

MAY 1856: SOUTHERN REACTION TO CONFLICT
IN KANSAS AND CONGRESS

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This thesis examines southern reactions to events that occurred in May 1856: the outbreak of civil war in Kansas and the caning of Senator Charles Sumner of Massachusetts. I researched two newspapers from the upper South state of Virginia, the Richmond *Enquirer* and the Richmond *Daily Whig*, and two newspapers from the lower South state of Louisiana, the New Orleans *Times-Picayune* and the New Orleans *Bee* to determine the extent to which political party sentiment and/or geographic location affected southern opinion towards the two events.

Political party ties influenced the material each newspaper printed. Each newspaper worried that these events endangered the Union. Some, however, believed the Union could be saved while others argued that it was only a matter of time before the South seceded.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
1. INTRODUCTION	1
2. BACKGROUND AND OVERVIEW OF PRIMARY SOURCES	2
3. THE RICHMOND PAPERS: APRIL-DECEMBER 1856.....	29
4. THE NEW ORLEANS PAPERS: APRIL-DECEMBER 1856	59
5. CONCLUSION.....	85
WORKS REFERENCED	92

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This thesis proposes to examine southern reactions to events that occurred in Kansas and in the national Congress in late May 1856. By looking at two newspapers from the upper South state of Virginia, the Richmond *Enquirer* and the Richmond *Daily Whig*, and two newspapers from the lower South state of Louisiana, the New Orleans *Times-Picayune* and the New Orleans *Bee*, I attempted to determine whether or not there were different attitudes between the upper and lower South towards slavery and the Union in general.¹ In examining the outbreak of civil war in Kansas and the caning of Charles Sumner, one finds that each region placed special emphasis on one event over the other. In addition, each paper proposed different methods to resolve the difficulties the Union faced. Some believed the Union could be saved; some believed that it was only a matter of time before the South became a separate nation. Although newspapers can not tell us exactly what the popular opinion in an area was they can tell us the opinions to which people were exposed.

¹ The actual name of the newspaper is the New Orleans *Daily Picayune*. I am using *Times-Picayune* because that is the way the paper is cataloged.

CHAPTER 2

BACKGROUND AND OVERVIEW OF PRIMARY SOURCES

Dramatic events in May 1856 had an impact on the future course of the country: the outbreak of civil war in Kansas and the caning of Charles Sumner caused sectional tensions to intensify. These two incidents helped lead the United States down the path to Civil War. Many historians have emphasized the differences of opinion between northerners and southerners relating to these two events. However few, if any, have focused on the differences in reaction between the upper and lower South to the caning of Charles Sumner and the conflict in Kansas. In spite of commonalities, southerners in the upper South and southerners in the lower South perceived the threat to the Union in different ways. Through studying the newspapers of Virginia (an old slave state in the upper South) and Louisiana (a relatively new slave state in the lower Mississippi and Gulf Coast region) one can get a sense of the different attitudes each area held towards slavery, the expansion of slavery, and whether or not to try to preserve the Union or to secede from it.

Although various compromises at the national level temporarily eased the tensions caused by slavery, throughout the course of the antebellum period tensions between the North and South periodically ran high. The Missouri Compromise of 1819 to 1820 caused a deadlock in the sixteenth Congress. Missouri's terms of admittance would set the precedent for the admittance of other states into the Union from the land acquired through the Louisiana Purchase. If Missouri entered as a state without restrictions, Congress would not have the power to touch the existence of slavery in Louisiana Purchase territories seeking statehood. On the other hand, if Missouri

entered as a state with restrictions, Congress would assume the power to restrict or expand slavery which would result in a centralization of power. Northerners and southerners knew that the sectional balance of power hinged on the outcome of the bill and it was tabled at the end of the congressional session.¹ When Congress met again in December 1819 the Senate linked the enabling acts of Maine and Missouri: the bill called for Maine to be admitted as a free state and Missouri to be admitted as a slave state without restriction. Jesse B. Thomas of Illinois added an amendment to restrict slavery north of 36° 30'. Once again Congress deadlocked when the House rejected the Maine-Missouri bill and amendment. Finally on March 2, 1820 a weary House agreed to strike the resolution and concur with the Senate bill. Missouri was admitted as a slave state with the Thomas amendment attached.²

From 1820 to 1846 a feeling of constitutional obligation kept many northerners from voicing their opposition to slavery.³ However the introduction of Texas as a slave state, the Mexican War, and the prospect of gaining a large amount of territory from the Mexican cession made further evasion impossible. The possibility of expansion once again threatened the state of the Union and foreshadowed that future party lines would be sectional and not ideological in nature. Sectional tension plagued the Whig Party. Although southern Whigs felt it was their patriotic duty to support the military, they opposed the Mexican War. They argued slavery could not be successful in the southwest therefore new land gained from Mexico would be of no benefit to the South. It would, however, increase the North's power and give it a renewed vigor for

¹ Michael A. Morrison, *Slavery and the American West: The Eclipse of Manifest Destiny and the Coming of the Civil War* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 45.

² Ibid, 52.

³ Ibid, 53.

abolitionism.⁴ The insertion of the Wilmot Proviso into the appropriations bill suggested a serious, though not yet wide, split in the Democratic Party.⁵ Northern Democrats saw the proviso as a conservative measure. It restored the language of the Northwest Ordinance and they believed it returned the party to its original purpose and would end discord within the Democratic Party. Southern Whigs and southern Democrats were equally against the proviso and viewed it as the first in a series of blows to come against slavery and the South's political power. The proviso insulted southerners because it stigmatized southern society as unclean and dishonorable. It challenged the South's right to direct its own destiny.⁶ As historian William J. Cooper notes "The Wilmot Proviso sparked such a powerful reaction in the South because southerners correctly identified it as a potentially lethal assault on their political power, on their safety, on their honor."⁷ Although the appropriations bill eventually passed without the proviso attached, the issues raised by the Wilmot Proviso remained unresolved.

During the spring and summer of 1848 Congress deadlocked once again over territorial organization. "Violent speeches, threats, challenges to duels, logic chopping, and artful obfuscations spoke to the burden that slavery imposed on the parties and the country."⁸ Although the thirtieth Congress passed an enabling act for Oregon, all other compromises failed and the Mexican cession remained unorganized. As historian Michael A. Morrison points out, the territorial debates from 1848-1850 revealed that

⁴ William J. Cooper, *The South and the Politics of Slavery 1828-1856* (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1978), 228.

⁵ Morrison, *Slavery and the American West*, 42.

⁶ Cooper, *The South and the Politics of Slavery*, 241.

⁷ Ibid, 238.

⁸ Morrison, *Slavery and the American West*, 85.

slavery was indeed the issue that separated the North and the South.⁹ The slavery discussion entered into almost every congressional debate.

On January 29, 1850, Henry Clay introduced a compromise bill to Congress. Clay asked that Congress take no action against the interstate slave trade, that California be admitted as a state immediately without any restrictions on slavery, and that the rest of the Mexican cession be organized into an unspecified number of territories. He felt that, because the land was unsuitable for slave labor, slavery would not extend into the new territories. However, he did not want to insult southerners by excluding slavery through congressional action.¹⁰ The bill proposed to fix Texas's border (to resolve a boundary dispute with New Mexico) and asked the federal government to assume Texas's debt as a form of payment for land lost in the compromise. It also provided for a rigorous fugitive slave law. On July 31, 1850, Clay's compromise measures failed to pass through Congress. Stephen A. Douglas resurrected the bill, divided it into its component parts, and introduced each one separately. From August to early September he maneuvered each proposal through the House and Senate. No bill obtained a clear, favorable majority from either party.¹¹ Congressmen divided, however, more along sectional lines than party lines: party affiliation had become a mirage. The last proposal was signed September 20, 1850.

The political vicissitudes and fragmentation that attended the compromise, a realization that the fruits of manifest destiny were hard to digest, and a growing sense of declension were all undercurrents that eroded the optimism of the 1840s. To many the cant of Young America seemed worn.¹²

⁹ Ibid, 98.

¹⁰ Michael F. Holt, *The Rise and Fall of the American Whig Party* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 479: Hereafter cited as Holt, *American Whig Party*.

¹¹ Morrison, *Slavery and the American West*, 125.

¹² Ibid, 135.

As Cooper notes, “With the success of the compromise the South had stopped the proviso, had gained congressional admission that Congress should not legislate on slavery in the territories, and had won a strict fugitive slave law.”¹³ The victory proved to be short-lived. Although the time from 1850-1854 outwardly seemed to be a period of stability, sectional tensions still lurked under the surface.

By early 1854, proslavery and antislavery forces realized that the growing population and need for additional land settlements meant that new states must be brought into the Union. The opening of Kansas and Nebraska to settlers could not be postponed any longer and Congress passed the Kansas-Nebraska Act, enabling settlers to move into the territory. Soon civil war would break out in Kansas and “Bleeding Kansas” would become a familiar term in every part of the Union and overseas. Criticism of the act “centered around two of its provisions: the repeal of the Missouri Compromise and the popular sovereignty principle for determining the issue of slavery in the two new territories.”¹⁴

The Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854 reopened sectional tensions that had been shoved under the rug after passage of the Compromise of 1850. “What Douglas and others, including Whigs and Free Soilers, did with that measure helped transform America’s political life and propel the Whig party to its grave.”¹⁵ In addition, when, amidst the tumult of sectional tensions,

Kansas was opened to settlement, an ordinary frontier process became fatally involved in the long range clash of North and South, and what was even more dangerous, in an approaching presidential election—a time when most

¹³ Cooper, *The South and the Politics of Slavery*, 301.

¹⁴ Granville Davis, “Arkansas and the Blood of Kansas,” *The Journal of Southern History*, Vol. 16, No. 4 (Nov., 1950): 431.

¹⁵ Holt, *American Whig Party*, 804-805.

Americans traditionally behave with magnificent insanity, and are ready to believe virtually anything about their opponents.¹⁶

Missouri border ruffianism, inept federal appointments to territorial offices, and ballot-stuffed election victories helped stimulate a new wave of antislavery protest.¹⁷ Civil war in Kansas made many northern abolitionists look to violence as a way to end slavery. “Many leaders on both sides foresaw with remarkable clearness that an impending crisis was at hand and that Kansas would be a decisive factor in the approaching conflict.”¹⁸

The original version of the bill, introduced by Douglas to the Senate in January of 1854, allowed territories to choose whether or not they would be slave or free at the time of admittance to the Union. Slaves would not be allowed to enter the territory during the territorial period. Problems arose when the House placed a specific repeal of the Missouri Compromise into the act—now settlers would be allowed to take their slave property into the new territories during the territorial stage. Douglas, in support of the bill, asserted that people, if left to decide for themselves, would vote against slavery.¹⁹ He believed that a territory could exclude slavery through legislation—settlers did not have to wait for statehood. Southerners disagreed with Douglas's view of popular sovereignty. They claimed the slavery question could not be decided until a territory was ready to become a state: territories should be open to slavery throughout the

¹⁶ Bernard A. Weisberger, “The Newspaper Reporter and the Kansas Imbroglio.” *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 36, No. 4 (Mar., 1950): 637.

¹⁷ Jeffrey Rossbach. *Ambivalent Conspirators John Brown, the Secret Six, and a Theory of Slave Violence*. (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 1982), 44.

¹⁸ W. H. Isley, “The Sharps Rifle Episode in Kansas History.” *The American Historical Review* 12, No. 3 (Apr., 1907): 546.

¹⁹ Robert W. Johannsen, “Stephen A. Douglas and the South.” *The Journal of Southern History* 33, No. 1 (Feb., 1967), 35.

territorial period. Southerners saw interference by a territorial legislature on the issue of slavery as being as bad as congressional interference.

Northerners viewed the repeal of the Missouri Compromise and the opening of Kansas and Nebraska to slavery as another example of the South's determination to dominate the government and extend slavery everywhere.²⁰ They argued that the act went against the Missouri Compromise and the Compromise of 1850. Northerners feared slave owners would overrun the Kansas territory before the North had a chance to populate it.²¹ After all, the slave power had always gotten its way in the past and now controlled Congress, the presidency, and the Supreme Court. The North feared the extension of slavery because "The most cherished values of the free labor outlook—economic development, social mobility, and political democracy—all appeared to be violated in the South."²² Northerners viewed the southern economy as stagnant and southern society as dominated by aristocratic slaveholders. They did not believe free labor could ever prosper in such an area.

California's admittance into the Union as a free state had already given the North an advantage in the Senate. Southerners feared that if Kansas became a free state, their political power would be further weakened. In addition the existence of slavery would be threatened in the long run if Kansas could not be brought into the Union as a slave state. The area into which slavery could be expanded was small in comparison to the area in which free states could be formed. Texas would not consent to being divided into several smaller slave states and the Missouri Compromise line had not

²⁰ Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party Before the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), 94.

²¹ Horace Andrews Jr., "Kansas Crusade: Eli Thayer and the New England Emigrant Aid Company," *The New England Quarterly* 35, No. 4 (Dec., 1962): 497.

²² Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men*, 40.

been extended to the land gained in the Mexican cession. Antislavery forces would soon have more power in the Senate and could outvote the South. In response to northern insistence that the Kansas-Nebraska Act repealed a sacred compromise, southerners argued that the Missouri Compromise never went into affect because northerners had not adhered to the Fugitive Slave Law. "The North's failure to support the Fugitive Slave Law had been evidence enough of the North's bad faith, and now the revulsion from the Kansas-Nebraska Act was deemed definite proof of malevolence and criminality."²³ They believed that, through omission, the Constitution acknowledged slavery and maintained that no limits could be placed on its expansion. Slavery supporters believed that the Constitution did not grant Congress the power to legislate on the issue of slavery. They argued that, because slaveholders could not move their slave property into free states, the present situation allowed people living in free states more rights than it did people living in slave states. Southerners viewed the Kansas-Nebraska Act and repeal of the Missouri Compromise as a way of righting past wrongs. The doctrine of squatter sovereignty seemed a way out, "Yet in the very first trial of the doctrine the proslavery forces took a beating that helped to precipitate the Civil War."²⁴ When Southerners attempted to expand their institutions, attitudes, and property westward, they found the competition severe.

Immediately after President Franklin Pierce signed the Kansas-Nebraska Act into law, Missourians moved into Kansas and established claims on extensive tracts of the best lands. Proslavery leaders took up claims, made minimal improvements, created claims organizations to protect their interests, and tried to maintain political control.

²³ Davis, "Arkansas and the Blood of Kansas," 434.

²⁴ Charles C. Howes, *This Place Called Kansas* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1952), 35.

Rumors of an eastern emigrant aid company sending 20,000 northern paupers to abolitionize Kansas caused Missourians to change their focus from the establishment of property rights for land speculation to the extension of slavery into Kansas.²⁵

Missourians feared defeat and resolved to disperse free state settlers in the territory and, if possible, to prevent the admission of more. Speeches were made in various parts of Kansas and Missouri advocating the necessity of Kansas's admission as a slave state. As historian James C. Malin points out "Insecurity was the most conspicuous characteristic of the Missouri slave society."²⁶ Missouri's prime interest in Kansas was as slave insurance for Missouri: slavery in the state would be threatened if Kansas became a free state.²⁷ The question of race and what would happen if slavery was abolished proved a greater dread to Missourians than the abhorrence of holding humans in bondage.²⁸

Missourians, reacting to the New England Emigrant Aid Society, began moving into Kansas in large numbers in 1855: just in time for the first territorial elections. Missourians asked other southern states to send aid and argued that, although the population of Kansas was still about equally divided between northerners and southerners, northern forces would soon send a large number of emigrants into the territory. Malin observes that "In many ways Missourians showed irritation at dictation from the lower South and its selfishness, a resentment that was held in check only by the greater hatred of selfrighteous meddling of the antislavery-abolition extremists of the

²⁵ Andrews, "Kansas Crusade," 501.

²⁶ James C. Malin, *The Nebraska Question* (Ann Arbor: Edwards Brothers, Inc., 1953), 406.

²⁷ *Ibid*, 396.

²⁸ *Ibid*, 421.

northeast.”²⁹ In response to Missouri’s call for help, southern aid societies sprang up throughout the South, various railroads furnished free passage to emigrants, and businessmen and planters donated small sums. “For a time enthusiastic Southerners deceived themselves with hopes of a quick and decisive victory” but few southerners migrated.³⁰ “Throughout the North,” however, “a crusading spirit was swiftly gaining depth and sweep” and northwestern emigration to Kansas eventually proved larger than southern emigration.³¹

Andrew H. Reeder, the territorial governor of Kansas, called for an election to take place in March 1854. Thousands of Missourians entered the territory and illegally voted on election day. All but two of the elected legislators were proslavery men. Missourians invasion of the election polls provided the basis for the rise of excitement about proslavery control of the government.³² John H. Gihon estimates that as many as 5,000 Missourians invaded the territory and illegally voted.³³ Even Douglas admitted election fraud had occurred, however he claimed it had been committed under great provocation: northerners had organized and poured settlers into Kansas, causing Missourians to send armed men across the border to seize election polls. In addition, he said that the activities of border ruffians had been exaggerated—election fraud had occurred in only seven of the eighteen election districts, otherwise voters in those

²⁹ Ibid, 426.

³⁰ Allan Nevins, *Ordeal of the Union Volume II...A House Dividing 1852-1857* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1947), 430.

³¹ Ibid, 431.

³² James C. Malin, *John Brown and the Legend of Fifty-Six* (Philadelphia: The American Philosophical Society, 1942), 509.

³³ John H. Gihon, *Geary and Kansas: Governor Geary’s Administration in Kansas with a Complete History of the Territory Until June 1857* (Philadelphia: N. E. Cor. Fifth and Chesnut Sts, 1857), 38.

districts would have complained.³⁴ Reeder (a man with slight proslavery leanings) allowed the election results to stand.

The proslavery legislature quickly met and adopted revised Missouri statutes as laws. In addition it stated that only proslavery men could hold office; only men who recognized the right to own slaves could serve on juries; and anyone who denied the right to own slaves, circulated antislavery literature, or asserted slavery did not exist in Kansas could be sentenced to imprisonment at hard labor for at least five years. It dictated that anyone who assisted a runaway could be sentenced to ten years in prison and anyone who incited a slave rebellion would hang.³⁵

Threats to, Reeder declared the proslavery legislature to be illegally in session because he had ordered it to sit at Pawnee and not at Shawnee Mission.³⁶ Proslavery legislators, however, passed laws over his veto and, Missourians, realizing that they could not control Reeder, petitioned President Franklin Pierce to get rid of him. The proslavery chief justice of the territory proclaimed the legislature was sitting, regardless of what Reeder said. Soon after, Pierce dismissed Reeder for supposed land speculations among the Indians and appointed Wilson Shannon, a blustering and tactless man, in his place. Shannon, clueless to the combustibility of the situation in Kansas, quickly proved a pawn of the proslavery party and recognized the proslavery legislature as the legal governing body of the territory.³⁷

Free state settlers, refusing to accept the proslavery legislature, called for an assembly to be held at Lawrence: they wanted to challenge the proslavery legislature

³⁴ Nevins, *Ordeal of the Union Volume II*, 422.

³⁵ Stephen B. Oates, *To Purge this Land with Blood: A Biography of John Brown* (New York, Evanston, and London: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1970), 100.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

and its hated laws. At the Big Springs Convention, September 5-6, 1855, attendees urged free state followers to abstain from participating in the October 1, 1856 congressional election called by the proslavery legislature.³⁸ They set October 8 as the election date for one free state congressional delegate and for delegates to attend the constitutional convention to be held in Topeka in December. Interestingly, the convention also advocated measures to completely bar blacks from the territory: free and slave. The majority of free state settlers in Kansas resented and disliked being called abolitionists—they wanted to keep all blacks out of the territory.³⁹

The Topeka Convention met in October 1855 and within three weeks wrote a free state constitution: free state settlers wanted to skip the territorial stage and become a full-fledged state immediately.⁴⁰ On December 15, they submitted the Topeka Constitution to popular ratification. Free state settlers adopted the constitution almost unanimously—proslavery residents did not vote. In March 1856, the free state government convened at Topeka. Members drafted a memorial to Congress asking to be admitted to the Union as a state under the Topeka Constitution. Procedures for organizing territories and for the transition of a territory into a state had first been established in the Northwest Ordinance. When the territory in question had a population of 60,000 free inhabitants, to bring it beyond the wilderness stage, the government could send a memorial to Congress asking for admission. Congress would then pass an enabling act, authorizing territorial citizens to frame a constitution. The territorial legislature would set up a constitutional convention and, if Congress approved the constitution, the territory would become a state. Most territories up to 1856 had

³⁸ Gihon, *Geary and Kansas*, 44.

³⁹ Oates, *To Purge this Land with Blood*, 99.

⁴⁰ Howes, *This Place Called Kansas*, 37.

followed the same basic procedure. Although free state forces used the precedents of California and Michigan to defend their actions (both had applied for admission to the Union without an enabling act by Congress), they disregarded one important point—in California and Michigan all the people had acted, not just one party.⁴¹

The Kansas question perplexed President Pierce. He was not efficient or impartial and was certainly in no hurry to commit on the Kansas issue. Although he had some southern support, he was neither successful nor popular. Pierce hoped to follow a middle road; he did not want to anger either side. Unfortunately there no longer was a middle road to follow. On January 24, 1856, Pierce asked Congress to authorize citizens of Kansas to frame a constitution. He sanctioned the proslavery legislature and condemned the Topeka legislature, calling it revolutionary because it had formed a constitution without an enabling act from Congress. He endorsed the laws of the territory and stated that the president did not have the right to ask whether a law was just or unjust, only if that law was constitutional. In his message, Pierce also declared it was his duty to use the power of the executive to enforce territorial law. He attacked northern emigrant aid societies and blamed them for the problems in Kansas. As historian Allan Nevins points out, overall Pierce misrepresented the situation—proslavery forces had committed election fraud and did not have the right to make any type of antislavery action a criminal offense.⁴² Pierce's message went far in giving free state forces in Kansas a justification they had previously lacked. "Nothing could have justified the extreme acts of the Topeka movement except clear evidence that President Pierce and the national government would furnish no redress; the freesoil Kansans

⁴¹ Nevins, *Ordeal of the Union Volume II*, 417-418.

⁴² *Ibid*, 417.

must strike hard for themselves, or be lost.”⁴³ Southerners, on the other hand, applauded the message.

Sporadic outbreaks of violence occurred in Kansas from November 1855 to May 1856. As Morrison notes, “Without minimizing the importance of the frequent and violent quarrels over land titles in that unhappy territory, politics there came to embrace the same controversy over slavery extension so lately heard in Congress.”⁴⁴ In December 1855, proslavery forces invaded and seized the town of Lawrence for the first time. Although a peace agreement was reached before any fighting occurred, this and other outbreaks of violence convinced the country that popular sovereignty in Kansas was in jeopardy and made many northern abolitionists look to violence as a way to free slaves. “As they saw it the illegal and violent acts of the proslavery party not only justified, but demanded, violence in return.”⁴⁵ In February, Pierce issued a proclamation warning both sides to stop violence in Kansas and placed federal troops at Forts Leavenworth and Riley to be used by Governor Shannon if he deemed it necessary. Northerners feared Shannon would act imperiously with Pierce’s support. Debate in Congress sprang to life as a result of the proclamation.

Congress proved equally inept in dealing with the issues in Kansas. The atmosphere in Washington was feverish in December 1855 when Congress met. As Nevins states

The national capital ought to have been a more reasonable place than the country at large. Instead, the disposition of members to collect in sectional boarding-house or hotel groups, the desire to speak lurid words for Buncombe County, the leadership of extremists in caucus gatherings, the trumpeting of the

⁴³ Ibid, 418.

⁴⁴ Morrison, *Slavery and the American West*, 161.

⁴⁵ Ralph Volney Harlow, “Gerrit Smith and the John Brown Raid,” *The American Historical Review* 38, No. 1 (Oct., 1935): 33.

Union, National Era, and other radical journals, made the city a boiling cauldron of party antagonisms.⁴⁶

The House of Representatives ground to a halt while trying to select a speaker. Personal and party feelings became aroused and each party wasted time posing questions to the candidates for speaker, demanding candidates define their positions. In early February, a rule to elect the speaker by a plurality instead of a two-thirds majority passed and Nathaniel P. Banks of Massachusetts was chosen House speaker. Republicans viewed this as a great victory. The House then turned to the business of Kansas. Free state and proslavery forces independently elected a representative to Congress (every territory had one House representative who, although he could enter debate, could not vote). Antislavery forces elected Reeder as their representative and proslavery forces chose John W. Whitfield.

While Republicans controlled the House, southerners held tenuous control of the Senate. By the end of March, Congress had two legislative proposals before it concerning Kansas. The first proposal, put forward by Senator Douglas, advocated Kansas be admitted to the Union when the population reached 93,420, the apportionment number required for a representative to Congress.⁴⁷ The bill provided a census be taken under the direction of the governor. Voting would be restricted to white males, over twenty-one, who had resided in the territory for at least six months and in the district at least three months. The white population of Kansas equaled around 30,000 and no one knew how long it would take the territory to reach the requisite population. In the meantime, free state settlers would be forced to live under the current government. The other bill, advocated by House Representative William Henry Seward,

⁴⁶ Nevins, *Ordeal of the Union Volume II*, 413.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 424.

called for the immediate admittance of Kansas as a free state under the Topeka Constitution. Seward believed that statehood would ease the tensions that arose from the situation in Kansas. It was a one party bill and excluded all dissenting elements.

It was evident that a stubborn refusal on one hand to trust Pierce, his Territorial governor, or the bogus legislature, a fixed determination on the other not to yield an inch to the 'rebel' Topeka government, was almost certain to produce a deadlock—the impending presidential campaign heightening the general disposition to appeal to prejudice.⁴⁸

The House would not consent to Douglas's bill and the Senate would not consent to Seward's bill. From April to June 1856, Congress set aside almost all other business except for the Kansas issue. The only bill to pass Congress concerning Kansas was a bill providing that the House send a committee to investigate events, especially accusations of election fraud, in Kansas. The committee consisted of three men: William Howard of Michigan, John Sherman of Ohio, and Mordecai Oliver of Missouri.

Northern Democrats who supported the Kansas-Nebraska Bill stubbornly defended the idea of popular sovereignty. They saw it as the best safeguard of freedom and viewed it as the fiercest opponent of slavery. These Democrats defended noninterference and considered free soil opposition subversive. They blamed the problems in Kansas on the Republican Party. Republicans, on the other hand, felt popular sovereignty provided a battleground. They viewed the civil war in Kansas as an extension of the conflict between free and slave societies—it was not a distant or isolated event. They saw popular sovereignty as a violation of the principle of self-government and considered the problems in Kansas a warning sign that proslavery forces would take full advantage of the repeal of the Missouri Compromise and extend slavery into more territories. Republicans believed it presented a broad based threat to

⁴⁸ Ibid.

northern freedom. Southern Democrats maintained that northern reports of the atrocities in Kansas had been imagined. The proslavery victory in choosing the territorial legislature had occurred because free state settlers had been moving out of Kansas. They believed that “Having failed at the ballot box, abolitionists (as they were routinely called) proposed to ignore the legal government, disobey the laws enacted for the good of citizens, and introduce anarchy and confusion through the limits of the territory.”⁴⁹ Southern Democrats charged Republicans with being a sectional party and maintained that white liberty and equality were disappearing in the North.

As Morrison notes, “beyond making a mockery of self-government, the political turmoil in Kansas had the effect of dividing the settlers into warring camps.”⁵⁰ Free state settlers saw the proslavery legislature as a fraudulent body advocating repugnant laws. Proslavery settlers saw the free state legislature as illegitimate and revolutionary. The federal administration’s denunciation of rebellion in Kansas, Congress’s heated debates, and northern avowals to make Kansas a free state encouraged militant attitudes. Talk of civil strife and disunion began to take place by the spring of 1856.⁵¹ News from Kansas did plenty to cast oil on the flames.

On March 4, 1856, in defiance of the national government, the free state legislature met at Topeka.⁵² Governor Charles Robinson, free state advocate, urged nothing be done in opposition to national or territorial authorities. The legislature set up a joint committee to prepare new codes of law for future adoption and elected Reeder and James H. Lane to the Senate in case Congress should admit Kansas as a state

⁴⁹ Morrison, *Slavery and the American West*, 173.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 161.

⁵¹ Nevins, *Ordeal of the Union Volume II*, 427.

⁵² Alice Nichols, *Bleeding Kansas* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1954), 93.

under the Topeka Constitution. Six weeks later the House Investigating Committee arrived in Kansas. After a brief session in Lecompton, the committee moved to Lawrence and Leavenworth, where they held dramatic hearings. Committee members spent ten hours a day hearing witnesses' testimonies of violence and election fraud. Their inquiries aroused bitterness on both sides. As coming events would show, the situation in Kansas was becoming increasingly volatile.

Throughout the spring rumors persisted that a large force of Missourians was preparing to march on the town of Lawrence. Citizens in Lawrence kept sentries on patrol day and night. On April 17 Sheriff Samuel J. Jones made his first official visit to Lawrence to arrest a free state man named Samuel N. Wood for contempt of court. Wood, with the help of other free state citizens, resisted arrest. Jones returned to Lawrence on April 20 with a posse of ten men. Again the townspeople resisted him. Jones left and went to speak to Governor Shannon in Lecompton's Brooke Hotel. He claimed that he had been assaulted (a free state man had punched him) in the discharge of his duties and demanded a military escort. Shannon, who had been authorized by the president to use United States troops in case of an emergency, granted Jones's demand. By Wednesday Jones had his federal escort and returned to Lawrence. He made six arrests before he and his forces retired to camp. That evening Jones was shot and badly wounded. Unfounded news that he had been killed spread quickly throughout the territory, further exciting tensions on both sides. According to free state settlers the proslavery press ranted and raved about the supposed murder for two weeks.⁵³

⁵³ Oates, *To Purge this Land with Blood*, 123.

In the midst of the committee hearings Judge Samuel D. Lecompte charged the grand jury near Lecompton to indict all members of the Topeka government as guilty of high treason, resisting territorial law, and resisting the authority of the United States government.⁵⁴ The jury indicted a number of men. Governor Robinson, free state advocate, who had just started for the East, was seized on a steamboat at Lexington, Missouri, and eventually taken back to Lecompton. The grand jury also indicted the two free state newspapers in Lawrence and the Eldridge brothers, owners of the Free State Hotel. They claimed that the hotel had been constructed with a view to military occupation and defense and was regularly parapeted and port-holed for the use of cannon and small arms. According to the grand jury, the Free State Hotel encouraged rebellion and sedition. On May 11, the grand jury announced its findings and Federal Marshal J. B. Donaldson issued a proclamation calling for a posse of law-abiding citizens to meet at Lecompton to aid in serving the grand jury's mandates: this gave proslavery forces the opportunity they had been looking for. As Nevins states, "Lawrence was becoming an intolerable thorn in their flesh and here was an opportunity to pluck it out."⁵⁵

Donaldson ordered law-abiding citizens to gather outside of Lawrence on May 20. Five to eight hundred proslavery men answered Donaldson's call and gathered on a hill overlooking the town.⁵⁶ Eight men entered Lawrence on May 21 under Deputy-Marshal W. P. Fain, an emigrant from Georgia, and arrested two men. The remainder of the proslavery force stayed outside of Lawrence and drank whiskey. Free state leaders invited proslavery leaders to dine at the Free State Hotel and Donaldson

⁵⁴ Nevins, *Ordeal of the Union Volume II*, 434.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid, 435.

dissolved the posse. However Jones, “a vindictive, blundering fool with a score of his own to settle, for to the great consternation of nearly all citizens of Lawrence, he had been wounded there the previous month by some person then unknown” immediately reorganized the drunken posse and took control.⁵⁷ Proslavery forces entered the town, destroyed the presses of the free state newspapers, and threw them into the river. In addition, the invaders placed three cannon near the hotel and fired on it. Their attempt to batter it to pieces, however, did not work and they tried to blow it up with a powder keg. When that failed, proslavery forces ransacked hotel rooms, seized the liquor stock, and burned the hotel down. The force pillaged a number of shops and homes and set fire to Governor Robinson’s house. Only one man, a southerner hit by a piece of the hotel’s falling wall, was killed. Lawrence citizens offered no resistance during the attack. As historian Alice Nichols notes, although they had men, guns and ammunition, they had no leaders and “More importantly, Lawrence had been soundly spanked by the President, by Congress and by the Territorial Grand Jury. She had no legal ground on which to give resistance.”⁵⁸

News of the sack of Lawrence spread swiftly throughout the Kansas territory. Free state settlers in the Osawatomie area quickly set out for the besieged town under the leadership of John Brown. On May 22, a messenger reached Brown’s group and reported that free state leaders in Lawrence had decided against fighting the proslavery forces. He also reported proslavery forces attacking the town, looting stores, destroying presses, and setting the Free State Hotel on fire. Later that morning another messenger came up to the group and told them that the crisis was over. U. S. troops

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Nichols, *Bleeding Kansas*, 105.

had taken charge of Lawrence and the Missourians were leaving the town. The messenger told them they should return to their homes—there was nothing they could do in Lawrence. Brown, angered that free state forces had not offered resistance, became agitated. He concluded it was his duty to avenge proslavery atrocities. “He had only one idea, one purpose, one passion: to defeat slavery by voting it out or running it out, by pursuing the conflict Missourians had initiated in Missouri into that state and freeing their slaves if it were necessary and could be done.”⁵⁹ Brown wanted to show proslavery forces and the Lawrence cowards that there was a free state man in Kansas not afraid to fight.

After breakfast on May 23, Brown called his men together and asked for volunteers who would obey his orders to go on a secret mission with him. While he packed the camp, Brown’s sons honed cutlass broadswords that had been given to him in Ohio to fight the free state cause. Brown, five of his sons, and two other men headed towards Pottawatomie, an area populated with proslavery families. Brown’s mission: to retaliate against perceived proslavery atrocities. Around 11 p.m. on May 24 the group arrived at the cabin of a proslavery man named William Doyle and his family. Brown ordered Doyle and his three sons outside. Salmon and Owen Brown killed Doyle and his two oldest sons with the broadswords but, at the pleas of Doyle’s wife, spared the life of the youngest son. The group then moved to Allen Wilkinson’s place. They ordered Wilkinson, who was up taking care of his sick wife, outside and killed him as well. Finally they arrived at the cabin of James Harris. There they killed a proslavery man by the name of William Sherman and returned to their camp. As one

⁵⁹ Richard O. Boyer, *The Legend of John Brown: A Biography and a History* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1973), 562.

contemporary reports “The men were butchered—ears cut off and the bodies thrown into the river the murdered men (Proslavery) had thrown out threats and insults, yet the act was barbarous and inhuman.”⁶⁰ Although settlers in the area immediately suspected Brown, no arrests were ever made.

The situation in Kansas quickly deteriorated further as a result of the Pottawatomie Massacre. “By Tuesday, May 27, a state of intense ‘fear and excitement’ prevailed in southeastern Kansas.”⁶¹ The attack did not make Kansas a free state, Brown never thought it would, “But it brought to the fore in free state councils the men who were determined to fight for freedom, and it meant the end of passive resistance.”⁶² In the free state camp opinion over the cause of the assassinations and whether or not it could be justified was split. Proslavery men not surprisingly unanimously denounced the murders as an abolitionist crime and clamored for bloody revenge.

Bushwhacking, intimidation, the return of ‘border ruffians’ from Missouri, the sack of Lawrence, and John Brown’s murder and mutilation of five innocent settlers near Pottawatomie Creek—all enhanced by colorful and creative reporting—seemed proof that a civil war had begun in Kansas.⁶³

Southeastern Kansas was in complete chaos. Free state and proslavery settlers alike fled the territory. Armed bands prowled the countryside, looting stores and homesteads and shooting at one another.

In the midst of the heightened tensions caused by events in Kansas, Senator Charles Sumner made a speech that further agitated sectional strife and caused House Representative Preston S. Brooks to take it upon himself to punish Sumner. Before his

⁶⁰ M. M. Quaife, “Bleeding Kansas and the Pottawatomie Murders,” *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 6, No. 4 (Mar., 1920): 559.

⁶¹ Oates, *To Purge this Land with Blood*, 140.

⁶² W. E. B. DuBois, *John Brown* (New York: The Modern Library, 2001), 79.

⁶³ Morrison, *Slavery and the American West*, 161.

famous “The Crime Against Kansas” speech, Sumner had secured a reputation as an outspoken critic of slavery. “As a politician, he would establish a repot [sic] for being a principled idealist who was wholly committed to the antislavery cause.”⁶⁴ By 1856 Sumner had served in the Senate for five years. “He had brought to his position a lofty devotion to principle, a fine sincerity, a wealth of learning, and a distinguished mastery of words; he brought it also self-complacent egotism, coldness of heart, humorless pedantry, utter intolerance of contrary opinions, and a highly irritating assumption of superiority.”⁶⁵ Both parties in the Senate had a tacit agreement to muzzle him—they did not want him to speak on the issue of slavery.⁶⁶

Two days before the sack of Lawrence, on May 19 at 1 p.m., Sumner began to make his “extemporaneous” speech on Kansas. In reality he had written the speech out several days beforehand and rehearsed it for several nights. The speech gave almost no new facts or information regarding Kansas. Its primary function was as a rhetorical exercise: the speech was not meant to convince senators of the wrongs done in Kansas but was meant to give northerners a literary masterpiece to mull over. “Sumner began by characterizing the treatment of Kansas as sacrilege, robbery, and tyrannical usurpation.”⁶⁷ However the majority of his speech consisted of a personal attack against Senator Andrew Pickens Butler (from South Carolina), a well-liked and highly respected member of Congress. He had recently suffered a stroke and was visiting his

⁶⁴ Manisha Sinha, “The Caning of Charles Sumner: Slavery, Race, and Ideology in the Age of the Civil War,” *Journal of the Early Republic* (Summer 2003): 240.

⁶⁵ Nevins, *Ordeal of the Union Volume II*, 437.

⁶⁶ J. Welfred Holmes, “Whittier and Sumner: A Political Friendship,” *The New England Quarterly* 30, No. 1 (Mar., 1957): 63.

⁶⁷ Nevins, *Ordeal of the Union Volume II*, 439.

home state at the time of Sumner's speech. The most insulting slur he made against the respected senator was his

reference "to the loose expectoration of Judge Butler's speech." Like many aged persons, the lingual or labial paralysis with which he was afflicted made it difficult for him to control his organs of speech and when he spoke he sprayed spittle.⁶⁸

As Nevins notes, "His rhetorical extravagances rose to pure rant in his closing sentences. But the most outrageous passages devoted an insulting phraseology to the states of South Carolina and Virginia, and to Senators Butler, Douglas, and Mason."⁶⁹ During the speech "Douglas, Isaac Toucey of Connecticut, and Robert Toombs, made an ostentatious pretense of being totally preoccupied with letter writing or engaged in loud and distracting conversation, but as the orator launched into his fierce indictment, they subsided."⁷⁰

Politicians from every political party questioned Sumner's motives in making the speech. They also questioned his sanity. At the conclusion of Sumner's oratory, Lewis Cass told the Senate that he deemed the speech "The most un-American and unpatriotic that ever grated on the ears of the members of this body."⁷¹ Douglas followed Cass's statement by saying that "He could not forgive Sumner's utterances on the ground that it was the language of impulse."⁷²

Preston S. Brooks, a representative from South Carolina and distant relative of Butler's, stood in the background during Sumner's speech. Brooks was tall, robust, and

⁶⁸ George Fort Milton, *The Eve of Conflict; Stephen A. Douglas and the Needless War* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1934), 233.

⁶⁹ Nevins, *Ordeal of the Union Volume II*, 441.

⁷⁰ David Donald, *Charles Sumner and the Coming of the Civil War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1967), 283.

⁷¹ *Ibid*, 286.

⁷² Nevins, *Ordeal of the Union Volume II*, 441.

a veteran of the Mexican War.⁷³ Although “some thought him a ‘stupid, overgrown good natured fellow,’” he was well-liked by women and popular with the men.⁷⁴ Abolitionists praised him for his restraint during the Kansas-Nebraska debate.⁷⁵ But “Under his placid exterior there burned a smoldering hatred of abolitionists, a proud devotion to the South and South Carolina, an intense loyalty to his family, and a determination to live by the code of a gentleman.”⁷⁶ Brooks spent two days brooding over Sumner’s public address. Because he had not heard the entirety of the speech himself, Brooks waited until he read a printed version of Sumner’s oration before he took action. On May 22, 1856, he marched into the Senate chamber and found Sumner writing at his desk. Brooks told Sumner: “I feel it my duty to say to you that you have published a libel on my State and uttered a slander upon a relative who is aged and absent, and I am come to punish you.”⁷⁷ With that he brought his cane down on Sumner’s head and beat him: the southern code of conduct dictated that an inferior be punished with a cane or horsewhip.⁷⁸

Brooks described the first blow as a mere tap; “Sumner said it blinded and stunned him so that he remembered nothing after.”⁷⁹ Brooks hit Sumner fifteen to twenty times, shattering his gutta percha cane before other senators intervened. Immediately following the attack, friends of Sumner carried him to the anteroom of the Senate chamber and called Dr. Cornelius Boyle to attend him. Boyle reported two long cuts and one short cut on Sumner’s head. In addition, Sumner suffered from bruises

⁷³ Milton, *The Eve of Conflict*, 234.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid, 235.

⁷⁶ Donald, *Charles Sumner and the Coming*, 290.

⁷⁷ Milton, *The Eve of Conflict*, 235.

⁷⁸ Donald, *Charles Sumner and the Coming*, 291.

⁷⁹ Laura A. White, “Was Charles Sumner Shamming, 1856-1859,” *The New England Quarterly* 33, No. 3, (Sep., 1960), 293.

about his hands, neck, and arms. Although he had a lot of blood loss, there was no concussion. "Sumner himself was apparently not alarmed, and he and all his friends expected him to be quickly restored."⁸⁰ No one believed that his injuries would cause a protracted leave from his Senate seat.⁸¹

The attack occurred on Thursday. By Tuesday afternoon and evening, Sumner's pain worsened considerably. By Wednesday he had a high fever and rapid pulse. Dr. Marshall S. Perry of Boston (hired by Sumner's brother George) took over the case. He found the wound over the right ear, although healed on the surface, to be "swollen and pulpy."⁸² The wound was allowed to drain and Sumner steadily improved. For the next three years, however, he suffered from a nervous disorder. Sumner relapsed anytime he overexerted himself physically or mentally.

The Senate quickly appointed a committee to look into the attack. They reprimanded Brooks for the assault, but concluded that they had no authority to discipline a member of the House of Representatives and decided to leave the matter to the House. The House set up a committee who voted to expel Brooks but failed to get the two-thirds majority necessary. On July 14, 1856, Brooks (along with fellow South Carolina representative Laurence Keitt) resigned his seat. Brooks regretted that the attack had occurred in the Senate chamber (he had attempted to reprimand Sumner in a location outside of Congress, with no luck) and stated that he did not attack with the intent to kill. If he had meant to kill Sumner, he would have used a pistol. South Carolinians unanimously reelected both Brooks and Keitt to their House seats.

⁸⁰ Ibid, 293-294.

⁸¹ Donald, *Charles Sumner and the Coming*, 302.

⁸² White, "Was Charles Sumner Shamming," 294.

“The assault became a departure point for the contemporaries to explore the meaning and relationship among slavery, race, democracy and republican government in nineteenth century America.”⁸³ For northerners, “The caning dramatically illustrated, instead, how the question of racial slavery could fracture the world of white republicanism.”⁸⁴ Northerners viewed the act as barbaric and felt men like Brooks posed a threat to the federal government. Southerners, on the other hand, saw the caning as honorable. To them, Brooks was vindicating his family, state, section, and slavery. They believed the white male political world to be based on the enslavement of blacks.

The events in Kansas and the caning of Sumner intensified sectional tensions and divided the nation. How did southerners in the upper South and southerners in the lower South react to these two events? Did people in the upper South have a significantly different response to the two events than those in the lower South, or did the two sections split along party lines instead of geographic lines? This study attempts to answer these questions by examining the *Richmond Enquirer*, the *Richmond Daily Whig*, the *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, and the *New Orleans Bee*. From these papers one can get a sense of what materials reached the public at large, how each event was portrayed, which events each paper placed greater emphasis on, and the methods each newspaper proposed to solve the sectional difficulties plaguing the country.

⁸³ Sinha, “The Caning of Charles Sumner,” 235.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

CHAPTER 3

THE RICHMOND PAPERS: APRIL-DECEMBER 1856

Richmond, Virginia was home to two prominent newspapers in 1856: the Richmond *Enquirer*, a pro-Democrat newspaper, and the Richmond *Daily Whig*, a pro-Whig newspaper. Party sentiment contributed to the way each paper construed the outbreak of civil war in Kansas and the caning of Charles Sumner.

The Kansas-Nebraska debate encompassed the country from 1854 to the beginning of the Civil War and a marked difference can be seen in the way in which each paper presented the events in Kansas. Although both papers supported the Kansas-Nebraska Act and the sack of Lawrence, the *Enquirer* was more radical than the *Whig* in its tone. The way they portrayed these events reflected each papers political alignment and sentiment regarding the settlement of Kansas and the extension of slavery. The Richmond *Enquirer* fully supported the Kansas-Nebraska Act and the repeal of the Missouri Compromise (or “Missouri restriction” as the paper often termed it): the paper saw the act as recognition of the South’s common rights in the territories. Much of the controversy surrounding the Kansas-Nebraska Act centered on the repeal of the Missouri Compromise and the paper advocated its repeal. The *Enquirer* argued that the compromise had been void before the Kansas-Nebraska Act took effect.

The *Enquirer* portrayed the adoption of the Missouri Compromise as the first of several attacks made on southern rights. “By an unconstitutional and odious enactment [the Missouri Compromise], the South was degraded from its legitimate position in the confederacy, and excluded from an equal enjoyment of right and privilege under the

constitution.”¹ Southerners endured the wrong for thirty years. The paper argued southerners, and in particular Virginians, only submitted to the compromise because they hoped it would be the final adjustment of the slave question.² This, however, proved not to be the case; “The Compromise, accordingly, so far from giving peace to the country, increased and exacerbated sectional feuds and discontent.”³

The *Enquirer* forcefully argued that southerners had every right to take exception to the Missouri Compromise and that the compromise had been null and void before the Kansas-Nebraska Act. The paper argued that, in legislating the Missouri Compromise of 1820 to 1821, the federal government undertook to usurp and exercise a power belonging to the states. The compromise professed to give peace to the nation by violating the rights of half of the country: “It did this on the ground that the institutions of the South were less worthy, less legitimate, less entitled to the protection of government than those of the North.”⁴ According to the *Enquirer* the Compromise of 1850 finalized the destruction of the Missouri Compromise. The paper argued that the Compromise of 1850 passed bills that grossly violated and endangered slaveholders rights; which in effect made the Missouri Compromise obsolete.⁵ First, the Compromise of 1850 allowed the admittance of California as a free state with boundaries usurped and defined by lawless adventurers.⁶ Its constitution excluded slavery from every foot of land held by the United States on the Pacific coast, south of Oregon. Second, the compromise allowed \$10,000,000 from the public treasury to be used to extinguish

¹ Richmond *Enquirer*, May 9, 1856.

² Ibid, May 2, 1856.

³ Ibid, May 30, 1856.

⁴ Ibid, May 30, 1856.

⁵ Ibid, May 2, 1856.

⁶ Ibid.

claims of Texas to territory claimed in the Mexican War.⁷ Third, it abolished the slave trade in Washington, D. C. In doing this, the federal government assumed the power to denounce and punish as a crime the transfer or sale of slave property.⁸ In addition, the *Enquirer* argued that by refusing to obey the Fugitive Slave Law, northerners violated the compact almost as soon as it was enacted. Finally the paper reasoned that the repeal of the Missouri Compromise in the Kansas-Nebraska Act did not violate a sacred trust. The compromise, like all other laws, was subject to modification and repeal. The *Enquirer* contended that it was absurd for one legislature's laws to bind its successors for all time: laws were made to be repealed when the people willed it.⁹ It was ridiculous to suggest otherwise. In the end the Richmond *Enquirer* portrayed the compromise in this light: "It was a measure fraught equally with injustice and sectional jealousies, feuds and contentions."¹⁰ The *Enquirer* contended that the repeal of the Missouri restriction offered atonement and reparation for past wrongs. It opened the federal domain to free expansion and the development of slavery.¹¹

The Richmond *Whig* did not take a strong stance on the Kansas-Nebraska Act or the repeal of the Missouri Compromise and did not dedicate many articles to either. The paper uneasily supported the Kansas-Nebraska Act and considered the repeal of the Missouri Compromise as the distinctive, essential principle of the act. The *Whig* claimed "And as for ourselves, and so far as the South is concerned, we care but little whether a Northern man was originally in favor of or opposed to the repeal of the Missouri Compromise, so he now subscribes to the non-intervention principle in respect

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid, September 12, 1856.

¹⁰ Ibid, May 30, 1856.

¹¹ Ibid, September 12, 1856.

to the territories.”¹² It felt the squatter sovereignty principle of the bill was dangerous to southerners because it recognized the citizenship of squatters. The *Whig* maintained that it supported southerners rights to go into territories with their property (slave or otherwise); if outvoted in the territory, however, southern settlers must yield to the consequences of immature legislation.¹³ The paper appears to have changed its position on the Kansas-Nebraska Act and repeal of the Missouri Compromise by December of 1856 (after the presidential election). The *Whig* claimed that it supported both in the beginning because it had been led to believe Kansas would be made a slave state.¹⁴ If Kansas did not come into the Union as a slave state the country’s peace would have been disturbed for nothing. The paper now believed that the repeal of the Missouri Compromise originated out of a spirit of wild, selfish, and unscrupulous partisanship.¹⁵

Both papers believed slavery was a necessary institution; southern economy depended on slaves for survival. However, once again, the *Enquirer* took a stronger stance on the issue. The paper argued that slavery protected southern white men. It asked “Where on earth is the working white man so respected as in the South?”¹⁶ Northern society reduced the working white man to the same level as free blacks by making them do menial tasks and services. In an article aimed at defending slavery from abolitionism, the *Enquirer* stated that “You, who affect to feel so much for the black man, should excuse our sympathies for the white man. If it be a weakness, ‘tis surely

¹² Richmond *Whig*, May 17, 1856.

¹³ Ibid, May 7, 1856.

¹⁴ Ibid, December 22, 1856.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Richmond *Enquirer*, July 8, 1856.

an amiable one that ‘leans to virtue’s side.’”¹⁷ The paper charged abolitionists with perpetuating slavery. Before abolitionists began speaking out about slavery the South was not satisfied with the social or moral sanction of it.¹⁸ Southerners even apologized for the institution and voiced their desire to find a safe and sufficient remedy for it. The paper argued that abolitionists drove southerners to either defend slavery or abandon it altogether; in doing so they convinced all thinking men in the South that slavery was the normal condition of society, justified by God’s sanction.¹⁹ “This reversal of judgment and of feeling in the South in respect to negro [sic] slavery, is the result of the aggressive agitation of the Abolitionists.”²⁰

The Richmond *Enquirer* argued that slavery was the strongest bond of the Union.²¹ It maintained that the Union would not have lasted more than twenty years without slaves.²² The paper contended that without slavery there would be no reason to keep together a confederacy that was so inconveniently large; without slavery there would be no mutuality of interest or dependence between the North and the South.²³ The North depended on the South for cotton, rice, sugar, wheat, corn, coffee, tobacco, and other agricultural products. According to the *Enquirer*, the Union and slavery must stand together or fall together.²⁴ The *Enquirer* put forth that “The South has never asked more than to be let alone; and from the beginning, has continually put up the appeal, hands off, to the North.”²⁵ Northerners erred by trying to settle the slavery

¹⁷ Ibid, May 13, 1856.

¹⁸ Ibid, July 8, 1856.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid, October 21, 1856.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid, November 11, 1856.

²⁵ Ibid, October 28, 1856.

agitation through congressional compromise: they should have abided by the original Constitution.

The *Whig* published few articles defending or justifying slavery. The few articles it did devote to defending the institution said very little. However the paper did argue that slavery did not mar the South's prosperity.²⁶ Slaves allowed the South to maintain herself.

The outbreak of civil war in Kansas, once again, set the *Enquirer* and the *Whig* at odds with one another. Party sentiment affected the way each portrayed the events in the troubled territory. The shooting of Sheriff Samuel J. Jones occasioned great excitement and the *Enquirer* speculated that civil war would soon break out in the territory.

We are on the eve of stirring times; the battle is to be fought here, and that quickly. The peace of the territory will never be safe while these lawless bands of rebels remain encastled at Lawrence. The lives of many peaceful men of this territory are now threatened—men whose lives are worth the whole of the town of Lawrence.²⁷

The *Enquirer* argued Governor Charles Robinson, free state advocate, and ex-Governor Andrew H. Reeder, while in the North, sought out the worst and meanest scoundrels they could find and sent them to the territory to precipitate fighting.²⁸

According to reports received by the *Enquirer* from St. Louis, 1500 men assembled at Lawrence, armed with Sharp's rifles, fortified with breastworks and two pieces of artillery with the declared intention of resisting all attempts to arrest its citizens; civil war in Kansas seemed eminent.²⁹ Southerners, responding to the

²⁶ Richmond *Whig*, August 12, 1856.

²⁷ Richmond *Enquirer*, May 16, 1856

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid, May 23, 1856.

Marshal's proclamation, encamped near Lawrence with the avowed purpose of compelling the town's citizens to acknowledge territorial laws. The paper reported that, after Federal Marshal J. B. Donaldson made arrests of the men he had warrants for; he turned his posse over to Jones.³⁰ Lawrence citizens resisted Jones when he tried to make further arrests and fired on the posse.³¹ The *Enquirer* also reported that Jones requested Eldridge, the owner of the Free State Hotel, remove his furniture from the hotel before cannonading it. Eldridge refused and the posse carried most of it out into the street. Jones ordered his men not to injure personal property, in particular Governor Robinson's house; a portion of the group, however, ignored the order and set fire to Robinson's home.³² According to the paper, free state leaders deserted Lawrence citizens in their time of greatest need and the town fell without resistance.

The paper justified the sack of Lawrence, saying the town was filled with murderers and thieves. "Lawrence is peopled by a set of hired assassins, men sent on by Beecher, Reeder, Robinson and other fanatics, who are only desirous of carrying out their particular interests and rendering their leaders rich and influential men."³³ Abolitionists "grew insufferably insolent. They began to bully and browbeat Southern people, and to talk of fight and Sharpe's rifles."³⁴ The Richmond *Enquirer* used the Pottawatomie Massacre to further illustrate the plight of southern settlers against abolitionists.

The enemy is advancing upon us—the next breath from Kansas may bring to our ears the shrieks of our fathers, brothers, sisters, sons, daughters, neighbors and

³⁰ Ibid, May 30, 1856.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid, May 16, 1856.

³⁴ Ibid, June 3, 1856.

friends who went there to find a home, but have been butchered by the Abolitionists; they call now for help and protection.³⁵

Northern papers reported that the Pottawatomie massacre was the fault of the proslavery party—five proslavery men, caught hanging an abolitionist, were shot in the act by the abolitionist's friend.³⁶ The *Enquirer* reputed this report, saying the atrocity was justly chargeable to the abolitionist party.³⁷ Prior to the murders, abolitionists settled on a policy of harassing and frightening southern settlers. They robbed stores, drove off cattle, stole horses, burned homes, and threatened to kill proslavery men.³⁸ The Pottawatomie Massacre, the *Enquirer* maintained, was simply the latest in a long list of cruel acts by abolitionists.

Like the *Enquirer*, the Richmond *Whig* blamed abolitionists for the outbreak of civil war in Kansas. Before the shooting of Jones, the *Whig* argued that the southern population in Kansas had grown so large that the fate of the territory had already been decided.³⁹

Besides which, many of the people of the North who came here with the strongest prejudices against slavery, have seen the error into which a one sided view of the subject had led them, and are now its warmest advocates not only on the ground of profit or convenience, but of utility and humanity.⁴⁰

The paper changed its tone after the shooting and expected a battle between proslavery forces and abolitionist forces to occur daily. In a letter from a law-abiding and conservative Virginian, purportedly giving an impartial and accurate account of events in Kansas, the author reported that abolitionists had established an independent

³⁵ Ibid, August 29, 1856.

³⁶ Ibid, August 1, 1856.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Richmond *Whig*, April 11, 1856.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

government in Kansas, in opposition to the existing, proslavery government.⁴¹ The letter argued it was imperative for law-abiding citizens to bring these men to justice and make them suffer the just penalties of the law. Once fighting broke out the *Whig* argued that “If the fight must come, no better theatre [sic] could be selected—under no more favorable circumstance could the campaign be opened. We already have the vantage ground:—and our cause is upheld and vindicated by the law and Constitution. Let us not prove recreant to it ourselves.”⁴² The paper argued that no worthy leader remained in Lawrence. Lawrence citizens’ refusal to obey territorial laws provoked the existing crisis. The paper portrayed the actions of free state settlers as revolutionary. “They are acting without a shadow of pretence to legal authority—they repudiate the legally constituted powers—defy their laws and set up an opposing government.”⁴³ The South submitted her rights in Kansas to the ballot box and won in numerous elections—it was time for northerners to acknowledge it.⁴⁴ Like the *Enquirer*, the *Whig* expressed outrage at the Pottawatomie Massacre and charged northern papers with indifference to the affair.⁴⁵ In an article from June 11 the paper confirmed the report of the murder of five proslavery men at Pottawatomie Creek by a party of free state men. The victims had been horribly mutilated; their throats cut, and in some instances their legs and arms had been chopped off and their eyes gouged out.⁴⁶ “How long are our feelings to be outraged by the threats of such miscreants as herd together in the accursed town of

⁴¹ Ibid, May 24, 1856.

⁴² Ibid, May 29, 1856.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid, June 5, 1856.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

Lawrence, a nest of outlaws and land pirates, which should be wiped from the fair face of our Territory which it has so long polluted?"⁴⁷

Unlike the *Enquirer*, the *Whig* believed the danger of serious trouble in Kansas would have passed after the first Lawrence confrontation if not for the political ambition of eastern men.⁴⁸ "In short, blood and carnage have been instigated for months past by fanatical clergymen and others at the East, and now they begin to see the fruit of their labor."⁴⁹ In addition, the *Whig* argued it had not been given a full account of what transpired in the territory: accounts from both sides were biased. The true matter at hand was still visible at a steady gaze—"The common territory of the Union is sought to be appropriated by a single section of the Union, to the total exclusion of the other section, which certainly has equal rights to the common property."⁵⁰ In a letter (signed Verity from Platte County, Missouri), the author argued that Virginians knew little of the true events in Kansas.⁵¹ He stated "A majority of the people in Kansas were and are for making it a free State. They are not abolitionists, but free State men."⁵² The author said he had lived a long time in Richmond and owned slaves, but that he believed free state men had the same right to wish and pray Kansas become a free state as proslavery men did to wish and pray Kansas become a slave state.⁵³

Party sentiment played a significant role in how much emphasis each paper put on sending emigrants to Kansas. Democrats unequivocally advocated emigration, while

⁴⁷ Ibid, June 13, 1856.

⁴⁸ Ibid, May 31, 1856.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid, May 28, 1856.

⁵¹ Ibid, October 10, 1856.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

Whigs cautiously supported it.⁵⁴ Even before the outbreak of civil war in Kansas, the *Enquirer* believed the settlement of Kansas to be the eminent question of the day. If the South lost Kansas, the paper argued, a blow would be struck from which southerners could never recover.⁵⁵ The South “must settle Kansas, and that speedily or successful agitation by the mad-men of the North, in this instance, will encourage and incite them to renewed and continued aggressions.”⁵⁶

The *Enquirer* believed there was nothing exceptional or abnormal in the original colonization of Kansas. Now, however, the settlement of the territory daily threatened civil war.⁵⁷ If settlers had been left to their own devices, Kansas would have been peacefully colonized and the territory would have become a state without any outbreaks of violence. Northern states altered the normal colonization process when they organized societies to subscribe money, enlist men and send weapons to Kansas. “In sending the squatter sovereigns to Kansas, the North ridded itself of pest and nuisance; and now their defeat and punishment will rid the Union of many traitors, and deter abolitionists from hatching treason hereafter.”⁵⁸ The paper argued that the influx of northern settlers sent by the Emigrant Aid Society roused southern settlers: “Abandoning their peaceful pursuits, they armed themselves, and prepared to repel the assaults with which they were threatened.”⁵⁹

After the sack of Lawrence, the *Enquirer* encouraged emigration more strongly than before. The paper blamed the recent troubles in Kansas on the Emigrant Aid

⁵⁴ The Richmond *Enquirer* did publish two short articles against sending aid to Kansas. One on May 20, 1856 and one on August 15, 1856.

⁵⁵ Richmond *Enquirer*, May 2, 1856.

⁵⁶ Ibid, May 13, 1856.

⁵⁷ Ibid, May 30, 1856.

⁵⁸ Ibid, June 6, 1856.

⁵⁹ Ibid, June 3, 1856.

Society. In a meeting at the Halifax County courthouse on May 26th, Granville C. Medley appealed to Virginians to send their abundance of money and men to Kansas.⁶⁰ He argued that it was the South's duty to populate Kansas and secure it as a southern territory.⁶¹ Emigrants must go to the territory to defend southern institutions, promote peace, and guarantee southern rights. Medley argued "The scheme is more cunning and cruel than we at first supposed and charged. We thought that this Emigrant *Slave* Society would have to await the fulfillment and profits of its nefarious plot, till the territory became densely settled."⁶² In a letter written from a person returning from Kansas, the unnamed author informed readers that settlers in the territory feared for their safety.⁶³ When people went to sleep at night they could not be sure they would wake up the next morning.⁶⁴ He stated that southern settlers would not yield to abolitionists and leave the territory; if southern states did not send aid, those settlers would suffer greatly.⁶⁵ Missouri was doing her part; it was time for Virginia and other southern states to do theirs.⁶⁶

Now is the time for action, if it is not done now, Kansas is lost—lost to the South forever, and when the abolitionists once find out they can run over the South, there is no telling where their atrocities will end. They boast now that they will finally whip the South into subjection.⁶⁷

Another article, dated July 8, asked, "Will Virginia, who has by far the largest slave population in the South, hold a deaf ear to the call of the proslavery cause?"⁶⁸ The

⁶⁰ Ibid, June 10, 1856.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid, July 4, 1856.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid, July 8, 1856.

paper argued that five Virginians would whip twenty Yankees.⁶⁹ In the August 1st edition, the *Enquirer* copied an article from DeBow's Review encouraging southern states to send aid to Kansas. "The cause is one which, without loss of a single day, every Southern man should contribute."⁷⁰ The question was not whether or not slavery would exist in Kansas, but whether or not slavery would exist in the Union.⁷¹ The article depicted Kansas as the outpost for the civil war that abolitionists waged against slavery.⁷²

Like the *Enquirer*, the Richmond *Whig* claimed to encourage emigration to Kansas. However, once again, the paper devoted few articles to the subject. Interestingly, in an article from May 8, the editor claimed that for the past week he had been confined to his sick bed and depended on a friend's aid during that time. He disavowed himself of the position his friend took on Kansas.⁷³ He said that he favored the South meeting the North on the plains of Kansas. The editor supported doing whatever was needed to protect the South, its citizens, and its property. However in the same article, he stated that he feared partisan considerations had too much to do with the impetus to aid emigration to Kansas.⁷⁴

The *Whig* published a letter from Chas. S. McKinney, a local resident, on August 30, in which he argued that a day of retribution was at hand.⁷⁵

If Virginia and other Southern States think proper to stand at a distance, and see her sons, who do not now, and never expect to own slaves, inhumanly butchered to her shame let her do so; but thank God there are a brave set of men in Missouri, who now, since the U. S. troops have refused to act and say it is a free

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid, August 1, 1856.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Richmond *Whig*, May 8, 1856.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid, August 30, 1856.

fight, will come to our rescue. Then there will be no quarter for Lane's men, but war to extermination.⁷⁶

Although the *Whig* did comment more on sending emigrants to Kansas after the sack of Lawrence, the paper did not openly advocate emigration.

Surprisingly neither newspaper commented much on Pierce's policy in Kansas. Although the Richmond *Enquirer* supported President Pierce's actions in Kansas, the paper had little to say about it. The *Whig* had nothing to say about it but did comment on Pierce's final message.

The *Enquirer* did not blame Pierce for the agitation in Kansas. Instead the paper stated that his administration had fallen on evil times.⁷⁷ The President had found his duty more obstructed by personal and political antagonisms than any other man before him.⁷⁸ In addition the *Enquirer* believed an impartial appreciation of his administration to be impossible during the present crisis of popular agitation and sectional strife.⁷⁹ The paper argued that Pierce did not change his policy regarding Kansas, nor did he ignore the controversy or refuse to participate in it. The paper vindicated Pierce's appointment of Reeder as governor of Kansas. No reasonable man could blame Pierce for the appointment of Reeder; if Reeder had remained true to his professed proslavery sentiments his position (as a northern man) would have exerted a beneficial influence to the South's cause in Kansas.⁸⁰ The paper argued Reeder was removed as soon as his double dealing and treachery was found out and that Shannon's appointment and conduct in Kansas gave the South no cause for complaint.⁸¹

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Richmond *Enquirer*, June 17, 1856.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid, May 27, 1856.

⁸¹ Ibid.

Both papers heralded Pierce's last annual message. The Richmond *Enquirer* stated

We seize the earliest occasion to perform the pleasant duty [of publishing opinion on Pierce's last annual message], and to announce, that in this last message, President Pierce has won new laurels, has justly entitled himself to the increased confidence of the patriots of the land, and to a more lofty nich [sic] in the temple of his country's fame.⁸²

The paper argued Pierce's doctrine was sound; he advocated and enforced a spirit of patriotism and devotion to constitutional rights and vindicated the wisdom of the Kansas-Nebraska Act. The Richmond *Whig* expressed admiration for the tone and temper of Pierce's views on the subject of slavery and the constitutional rights of the states.⁸³ The paper believed the president to be sincere in his patriotism and stated that he correctly placed the blame for the perpetual agitation and discord in the country on Republicans.⁸⁴ However the *Whig* did worry as to what the fate of Kansas would be under the new administration. "The whole country has been thrown into a state of continuous excitement and agitation, and the Union itself has been made to reel and totter—and all about Kansas."⁸⁵

Because many heated debates took place in Congress over Kansas, one would expect the Richmond papers to take a strong stance on congressional events. Surprisingly neither did. Although each paper published articles concerning congressional proceedings in almost every issue, neither paper opined on congressional actions. This could be because of the stalemate in both House's following the outbreak of civil war in the territory. Although many proposals were put

⁸² Ibid, December 5, 1856.

⁸³ Richmond *Whig*, December 4, 1856.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid, December 22, 1856.

before the House and the Senate, none gained enough support to pass through Congress.

Both papers believed the troubles in Kansas and the resulting conflicts in Congress endangered the Union. The *Enquirer* argued that the Union would be dissolved if the Republican Party came to power. The *Whig*, although it felt that both the Republican and Democratic parties promoted sectionalism, fervently argued against disunion.

The Richmond *Enquirer* did publish articles concerning the Republican Party and their actions in Congress. The paper stated that black Republicans sent the Kansas Investigating Committee to the territory to foster and aid rebellion.⁸⁶ The *Enquirer* argued that abolitionists were indisputably in control of the House and that Kansas must be made a slave state for the South to maintain equality in the Senate.⁸⁷

Unlike the *Enquirer*, the *Whig*, doubted that Kansas would be admitted as a slave state.⁸⁸ Since it was impossible for the South to attain equality with the North in either branch of Congress, there should be a return to the policy of former days—geographical parties should not exist.⁸⁹ “Create *geographical parties*, with the South in such a woful [sic] minority—and what will be her fate?”⁹⁰ If the agitation in Congress continued, the paper argued, the South would be at the mercy of the North within a few years.⁹¹

The Democratic *Enquirer* viewed the Republican Party as the greatest threat to the Union. The paper argued that it was not hatred of slavery or sympathy for slaves

⁸⁶ Richmond *Enquirer*, June 17, 1856.

⁸⁷ Ibid, September 12, 1856.

⁸⁸ Richmond *Whig*, November 10, 1856.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

that kindled the enthusiasm and resentment of Republicans but that “It is envy of the ease and affluence of the Southern gentlemen, and jealousy of the aristocratic character of our social system, which constitute the sentiment of abolitionism.”⁹² If the populace elected John C. Fremont as president, the *Enquirer* saw secession as the only way to save slavery. After the election the paper rejoiced that the Union had been saved:

We say then, to the patriots North, to the patriots South, cheer up—we have passed the quicksands,—we have crushed out the spirit of disunion;—we have stricken the Abolition monster a fatal blow, and we now have better guarantees for the future; based, as they are upon sounder principles, and more in union with the genius, and true principles of our free Institutions; than we have before had, since the memorable contests of 1820.⁹³

The *Enquirer* rejoiced: James Buchanan’s election meant peace for the country.

In contrast, the Richmond *Whig* argued that abolitionists of the North and secessionists of the South were remarkably similar in their arguments and conclusions. “Differing radically on every point, they arrive at precisely the same end through different channels of reasoning.”⁹⁴ Although the *Whig* feared that the election of either Buchanan or Fremont would result in disunion, it maintained that secession was not the answer to the current problems plaguing the country. Dissolution of the Union would bring about fratricidal war and irreparable woe.⁹⁵ The paper asserted that the idea of disunion should not be tolerated for even a moment.⁹⁶

⁹² Richmond *Enquirer*, September 5, 1856.

⁹³ Ibid, December 16, 1856.

⁹⁴ Richmond *Whig*, October 16, 1856.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

The *Whig* wanted the Union to be maintained.⁹⁷ It believed that slavery could survive in the Union if conservative men banded together but that “Madness does seem to rule the hour and black clouds, portending naught but evil to the country, hang over the land.”⁹⁸ It asked for honest men of all parties to question where the Union was driving.⁹⁹ The paper appealed to southern conservatives to join with northern conservatives to beat back the formidable array of sectionalists.¹⁰⁰ The *Whig* argued that “The country must be saved, the people must work the salvation, party must be abandoned, and patriots, none but patriots, assume the great duty of the general weal and protecting, truly and fully the rights and the Constitution of the States and the Union.”¹⁰¹

Although the *Enquirer* and the *Whig* frequently held divergent views regarding events in Kansas, they were in much closer agreement regarding the caning of Senator Charles Sumner by House Representative Preston S. Brooks. Though differences in party sentiment can be seen in the way each newspaper presented the caning of Charles Sumner, these differences are more difficult to find. Both papers condemned Sumner’s speech against Kansas as inflammatory and revolutionary. Both heralded Brooks for the caning; both believed he had no other course of action open to him. There are, however, subtle differences in the information each paper chose to present on the caning. A more obvious difference of opinion can be seen when examining what each paper said about the location of the assault and whether or not the House had the

⁹⁷ One article in the *Richmond Whig* from Monday, August 11, 1856 did advocate disunion. This article appeared after the House (controlled by Republicans) voted against the Army Appropriations Bill (Republicans had added several amendments to the bill concerning Kansas).

⁹⁸ *Ibid*, September 3, 1856.

⁹⁹ *Ibid*, September 26, 1856.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid*, August 19, 1856.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid*, September 3, 1856.

right to take cognizance of the event. Surprisingly the *Whig*, which took a moderate position on the events in Kansas, took a militant stance on the Sumner case.

The Richmond *Enquirer* and the Richmond *Daily Whig* condemned Sumner's "The Crime Against Kansas" speech delivered in the Senate. The *Enquirer* claimed Sumner rehearsed the speech before he delivered it. According to Stephen A. Douglas, "These libels and insults, gross and vulgar as they were, had been conned over and written with cool, deliberate malignity, and repeated night after night, till they were thoroughly learned, so that he might have the appropriate grace to spit them at those men who differed from him."¹⁰² "Douglas said Sumner rehearsed the speech before the mirror with a little negro boy to hold the candle and watch his gestures until he committed it to memory."¹⁰³ The *Enquirer* criticized Sumner for the language he used in the speech saying it was vulgar, full of vituperation and the coarseness of it exceeded anything ever said before in the Senate chamber.¹⁰⁴ The paper accused Sumner of libeling South Carolina and Senator Andrew Pickens Butler, "Was ever a libel greater, more malignant and mischievous than that of Sumner upon the State of South Carolina and her venerable Senator?"¹⁰⁵

The Richmond *Whig* accused Sumner of rehearsing his speech as well, to his friends, who then repeated it in the city's saloons.¹⁰⁶ It, too, said Sumner practiced the speech in front of a mirror with a Negro boy to aid him in adjusting the action to the word.¹⁰⁷ The paper stated that Sumner's speech smacked of the ravings of a maniac

¹⁰² Richmond *Enquirer*, May 23, 1856.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, June 13, 1856.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Richmond *Whig*, May 23, 1856.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, May 27, 1856.

and wondered that the northern press did not realize that insult and injury could be conveyed through words: that blows did not have to be struck for insult and injury to occur. Unlike the *Enquirer*, the *Whig* argued Sumner's "warlike speech has turned our thoughts very much to this war—and we confess that the more we think of it, the better we like it. We are heartily sick and disgusted with the canting and mercenary hypocrites of Yankeedom."¹⁰⁸ War would at the very least enable the South to turn the tables on abolitionists, at the most to get rid of them altogether.¹⁰⁹ In one article the *Whig* even advocated reuniting with the mother country (Great Britain)—the paper maintained it would be better to be ruled by a lady like "Queen Vic" than a Yankee.¹¹⁰

Both the *Enquirer* and the *Whig* praised Brooks for the assault on Sumner. In an article from the *Enquirer* signed "A Looker On", the author accused northern men of using their positions as senators and representatives to vent their obscene and vulgar abuse on the South and her representatives.¹¹¹ He asked

What are Southern men to do, if they may not whip their detractors as Brooks did, since they cannot, with any decency or propriety, without forfeiting their claim to respect at home as well as abroad, and without violating the rules and privileges of the Senate, return obscenity for obscenity?¹¹²

The author did not deny others rights to express a difference of opinion on slavery, but said that he would not allow the subject to be aggravated by personal insults and obloquy.¹¹³ According to the *Enquirer*, no adequate law existed that allowed southern gentlemen to protect their own honor. The *Enquirer* expressed disgust with other southern journals who chastised the assault.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, May 28, 1856.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Richmond *Enquirer*, May 30, 1856.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid.

A few Southern journals, affecting no exclusive refinement, of feeling or regard for the proprieties of official intercourse, unite with the abolition papers in condemning the chastisement, inflicted upon Sumner by the Hon. P. S. Brooks. We have no patience for these mealy mouthed Pharisees of the Press.¹¹⁴

The paper believed abolitionist senators were getting above themselves. "They have been humored until they forget their position. They have grown saucy, and dare to be impudent to gentlemen."¹¹⁵ Abolitionists must be brought into submission and deserved a good lashing. For every vile word spoken against the South, abolitionists should suffer a certain number of stripes; they would soon learn to behave like decent dogs, but could never be classified as gentlemen.¹¹⁶ Sumner himself should have been lashed nine and thirty times every morning: "He is a great strapping fellow and could stand the cowhide beautifully."¹¹⁷

Even though the *Whig* rejoiced over the assault and called it a good deed, the paper did not vindicate the caning like the *Enquirer* did. The *Whig* stated that "The only regret we feel is, that Mr. Brooks did not employ a horsewhip or cowhide upon his slanderous back, instead of a cane."¹¹⁸ The *Whig* expressed the desire that northerners behave like gentlemen and not vilify southerners.¹¹⁹ The paper wondered that southerners had endured so much for so long, "There are no other people on the face of the earth who would have patiently submitted to such indignities and such wrongs as those wretches have habitually and systematically imposed upon the South."¹²⁰

The *Enquirer* praised Brooks's attack on Sumner. The paper argued that Brooks duly warned Sumner before the assault. The *Enquirer* also argued that Brooks did the

¹¹⁴ Ibid, June 3, 1856.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Richmond *Whig*, May 23, 1856.

¹¹⁹ Ibid, May 27, 1856.

¹²⁰ Ibid, May 30, 1856.

only thing he could do given the circumstances involved: he retaliated against Sumner by inflicting a personal chastisement.¹²¹ The paper maintained that Sumner rose from his seat before a single blow was struck and received no more than a dozen hits. Brooks ceased the attack as soon as Sumner fell to the floor. Sumner did not fight back but did attempt to ward off the blows. "Mr. Brooks' coolness and courage as attested by all the witnesses, present the most striking contrast to the cowardice of the craven-hearted wretch from Massachusetts. Throughout the affair his conduct was characterized by equal spirit and delicacy of sentiment."¹²²

On June 20 the *Enquirer* published a letter dated May 31 from men at the University of Virginia. The men believed Brooks's actions would likely prevent further conflict from taking place.¹²³ Although they regretted the existence of the state of circumstances that forced Brooks to assault Sumner, they approved his actions. Northern men had shielded themselves behind parliamentary usage and privilege for far too long.¹²⁴ "As Southern men and lovers of our country, we would herewith express our approval of your late conduct in avenging as you did, an insult cast upon an aged relative, and the State which you represent."¹²⁵

Although both papers praised the caning, the *Whig* expressed remorse that the attack took place in the Senate chamber; the *Enquirer* did not. The *Enquirer* argued that Brooks attempted to find Sumner outside of the Senate. Circumstances beyond his control prevented it.¹²⁶ "The Senate was not in session, and after a vain search for C.

¹²¹ Richmond *Enquirer*, June 17, 1856.

¹²² Ibid, June 6, 1856.

¹²³ Ibid, June 20, 1856.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid, May 27, 1856.

Sumner elsewhere, Mr. Brooks was constrained to give him his deserts upon the very spot from whence he issued his vulgar libels upon his distinguished relative.”¹²⁷ The paper believed it was ludicrous for people to say Brooks should not have struck Sumner in the Senate chamber—to say that made it the privilege of the room that must be vindicated, not the senator.¹²⁸ The *Enquirer* felt Brooks deserved applause for his bold action against Sumner: “It was a proper act, done at the proper time, and in the proper place. Of all places on earth the Senate chamber, the theatre of his vituperative exploits, was the very spot where Sumner should have been made to suffer for his violation of the decencies of a venerable statesman.”¹²⁹

Although the Richmond *Whig* expressed regret that Brooks did not give Sumner notice of the attack, the paper stated it was unsure if such notice was due.¹³⁰ It was rumored that Sumner expected an attack to be made. Even if Sumner did not anticipate the attack, his speech justified any action Brooks might take. In addition, the paper argued, it must be remembered that Sumner was of physically fine proportion and weighed twenty to thirty pounds more than Brooks.¹³¹ The Richmond *Whig* supported the caning, but regretted that Brooks did not send word to Sumner before the assault and that the attack took place in the Senate chamber. The *Whig* believed that if Brooks had challenged Sumner to a duel, per the southern gentleman’s code, all good men in the Union would have commended him without reservation.¹³²

¹²⁷ Ibid, May 30, 1856.

¹²⁸ Ibid, June 13, 1856

¹²⁹ Ibid, June 3, 1856.

¹³⁰ Richmond *Whig*, June 4, 1856.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Ibid, May 27, 1856.

Neither paper believed the House had the right to take cognizance of a private quarrel; it stepped beyond its jurisdiction in doing so. The *Enquirer* argued that the presence of Sumner, Wilson, and Wade desecrated the Senate chamber—it therefore no longer had sanctity of place.¹³³ The paper asserted a breach of privilege could occur through a blow or through the use of provocative and insulting language.¹³⁴ Given this, Sumner himself was guilty of a breach of privilege and subject to arrest and punishment; in giving the speech Sumner had put himself beyond the pale of privilege. The paper asked, just because he wears senatorial robes, which he has disgraced, should he go unpunished?¹³⁵ The *Enquirer* argued it was idle to speak of union, peace or truce with Sumner or his friends and that Black Republicans in Congress were in open war with the government.¹³⁶ “Government, which cannot suppress such crimes as theirs, has failed, of its purpose. Either such wretches must be hung or put in the penitentiary, or the South should prepare at once to quit the Union.”¹³⁷

The *Enquirer* asked what the House had to do with the affair even if a breach of privilege had occurred.¹³⁸ The Constitution did not give the House the power to punish members for arguments that occurred on the street or in taverns. In addition, the paper argued, that the Constitution did not literally mean that no congressman could ever be questioned over a speech: it was absurd to think that. The Constitution meant that members should not be held legally responsible for words spoken in debate, leaving congressmen to redress personal wrongs as others may.¹³⁹ The *Enquirer* stated, if the

¹³³ Richmond *Enquirer*, June 3, 1856.

¹³⁴ Ibid, June 13, 1856

¹³⁵ Ibid, May 27, 1856.

¹³⁶ Ibid, June 10, 1856.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid, June 13, 1856.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

offense did not occur before the House, it must be an infamous event before the body could expel any member.¹⁴⁰ If the Senate could not expel Brooks for the assault, the House certainly could not dismiss him.¹⁴¹ The *Enquirer* argued that the Senate was the property of the North and the South: it was monstrous to tell southerners they could not enter the Senate chambers unless they submitted themselves to constant insult and obloquy.¹⁴² “If Sumner be protected and Brooks punished, our disgrace will be proclaimed and our inferiority established, unless we resist and right ourselves—and *we will do it.*”¹⁴³

After reflection, the *Whig* argued that neither House had anything to do with the affair.¹⁴⁴ The attack did not occur in the presence of either House and the Senate was not in session when the assault took place, therefore its dignity was not aggrieved. The matter was a personal one, belonging to the courts. Brooks being a House member did not change the matter. “In assaulting Sumner, he acted not in the capacity of a Representative, but of an individual, and it was not *Senator* Sumner that he caned, but a foul-mouthed abolitionist from Massachusetts.”¹⁴⁵ If the House expelled Brooks for his actions, the paper argued, Sumner should be expelled as well.¹⁴⁶ Sumner committed the first outrage by defaming Butler and the South. The consequences should fall on him for his wrong doing. The *Whig* said no man should have the right to defame others under cover of doing the duties of his office and should not be able to

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, July 4, 1856.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Richmond *Whig*, June 7, 1856.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

destroy a person's reputation and the peace of other citizens through the press.¹⁴⁷ The paper argued that if Congress's power was extended to events that took place outside of Congress there would be no limit: Congress could exercise power over members even when recessed.¹⁴⁸

The Richmond *Enquirer* and the Richmond *Whig* both believed Brooks's resignation from the House would result in his unanimous reelection by South Carolina voters. The *Enquirer* believed that readers of Brooks's address to his constituency would approve of his actions. In the letter he shrank back from a position of prominence and appealed the vindictive sentence of the Black Republicans to the calm judgment of the people. Brooks explained his actions saying that, although he had never been called to order,

a majority of the House has pronounced, me, because of my act, unworthy of a seat in the American Congress. I could not, as the representative of a high-toned and gallant constituency, rest with this imputation upon you and myself. I resigned my seat, and kicking the dust of a Black Republican majority from my feet, I left the Hall in indignation and disgust.¹⁴⁹

"The act which so suddenly exposed him to public observation, however justified by adequate provocation, necessarily associated his name with ideas of intemperate passion and physical violence rather than of personal dignity and intellectual power."¹⁵⁰

The *Enquirer* believed that anyone who knew Brooks would attest to his modesty and aversion to any ruffian reputation. Those who knew the nature of South Carolina's voters would not doubt his reelection.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Richmond *Enquirer*, July 29, 1856.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

The *Whig* did not publish Brooks's letter to his constituents but did (as did the *Enquirer*) publish his address to the House and the announcement of his resignation. Brooks said that he believed the attack to be a personal affair and did not think he would be punished by a court of law or by a majority of the House.¹⁵¹ "He spoke of Massachusetts as being in rebellion against the laws and the Constitution of the United States, whilst sitting in judgment on him and demanding his expulsion without a hearing."¹⁵² Brooks argued that if he had desired to kill Sumner he would have: everyone agreed it was in his power to do so. Instead he used an ordinary cane, expressly to prevent taking Sumner's life.¹⁵³ Brooks believed the vote in the House portrayed him as unworthy of his seat because of disorderly behavior, even though he had never been called to order.¹⁵⁴ He closed his speech saying that, foreseeing the action the House would take, ten days ago he submitted his resignation to the governor of South Carolina, to take effect when announced on the House floor.

Both papers took the northern press to task for the position they took on the assault. The *Enquirer* condemned northern papers for attempting to make a martyr out of Sumner.

The good sense of the nation will soon regard the whole matter in its true light, and the people will view with disgust an attempt to create an awful excitement throughout the Confederacy, because Senators, who outrage decency and propriety, are punished as they deserve. The attempt to make a martyr of Sumner will prove a monstrous abortion.¹⁵⁵

The paper wondered that Sumner had strength enough to tear his desk from its fastenings, but not enough strength to strike a blow, grab Brooks's cane, or seize

¹⁵¹ Richmond *Whig*, July 16, 1856.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Richmond *Enquirer*, May 27, 1856.

Brooks's arm.¹⁵⁶ The *Enquirer* encouraged readers to imagine an army of Sumner's faced with Brooks, Keitt, and Edmundson armed with gutta percha canes, then tells the reader to hold his sides until he is done laughing.¹⁵⁷

The *Whig* also condemned northern papers for their depiction of the assault. The paper argued that the caning was a theme of fruitful and malignant comment in the northern press.¹⁵⁸ "The Bostonians are quite as furious as their forefathers were when they threw the tea overboard, and something quite as desperate may be anticipated from their present wrath."¹⁵⁹ The paper hoped they would not hurt themselves in the process.¹⁶⁰

The *Enquirer* and the *Whig* both believed Sumner was playing possum. Sumner's injuries kept him out of his Senate chair for three years; the *Enquirer* and the *Whig* felt Sumner could have returned to his seat the next day. The two papers accused Sumner of using his injuries to further the abolitionist cause. As early as June 3, the *Enquirer* published an article from the Charleston *Mercury* saying Sumner was using his illness as a pretense to excite sympathy for him.¹⁶¹ The article went on to say that one must keep in mind that Sumner outweighed Brooks by twenty to thirty pounds and that Brooks informed Sumner of his intentions before the assault.¹⁶² The *Enquirer* argued the first physician who attended Sumner said he could have gone out of his rooms the next day.¹⁶³ "We are satisfied that friends of Mr. Sumner, whether intentionally or not we will not pause to say, are circulating over the country statements

¹⁵⁶ Ibid, June 13, 1856.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Richmond *Whig*, May 27, 1856.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Richmond *Enquirer*, June 3, 1856.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Ibid, June 6, 1856.

in relation to his condition since the chastisement inflicted on him, which are not warranted by the facts.”¹⁶⁴ Northern newspapers contained daily bulletins from Washington on Sumner’s health, creating the false belief that he was in a critical state because of wounds and bruises.¹⁶⁵ The paper said Republicans exaggerated Sumner’s sickness to keep up the Kansas excitement.¹⁶⁶

Like the *Enquirer*, the *Whig*, believed Sumner was faking his illness. “The daily and hourly reports from Washington concerning the condition of Sumner, are all very strange and funny and lead us to believe that the Abolition wretch, with his Abolition physicians as accomplices in the trick, is playing *possum*.”¹⁶⁷ One minute the press reported Sumner to be doing well, the next minute he was reported to be in critical condition.

Our own opinion is that the possuming fellow will hardly ever recover, so far as his ‘nervous system’ is concerned. The derangement of his ‘nervous system’ has all along constituted the sum and substance of his illness. He was, no doubt mighty scared, and we suspect he still dreads another flagellation.¹⁶⁸

The paper never believed it was necessary for Sumner to take to his sick bed.¹⁶⁹ “Least of all do we believe that the well-deserved *gutta serena* he received was so severe a character as to detain him in confinement for more than a week.”¹⁷⁰ The paper joked “We think the bare sight of a hundredth part of a Southern man would impart to the possuming wretch strength enough to enable him to take up his bed and walk—yea, walk even to Boston.”¹⁷¹ The *Whig* also believed Sumner’s friends circulated false

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid, June 20, 1856.

¹⁶⁷ Richmond *Whig*, May 31, 1856.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid, June 13, 1856.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid, May 31, 1856.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

accounts of his condition.¹⁷² “There has been no consultation of physicians—no critical condition—all humbug, put forth to excite the tears of the tender-hearted women and chicken-hearted men of Boston.”¹⁷³ The paper suspected Sumner had fallen more from fear than from the blows and never believed that a hollow gutta percha cane could have caused half the damage that has been talked of.¹⁷⁴

In looking at the Richmond papers, it is easy to see that party sentiment played a role in how each paper portrayed the events in Kansas, and even the caning of Sumner. Did the Louisiana papers show such a split? Did the upper South Virginian papers take a more or less radical view than the lower South Louisiana papers? Or did party sentiment affect the depiction of events more than geographic location?

¹⁷² Ibid, June 4, 1856.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

CHAPTER 4

THE NEW ORLEANS PAPERS: APRIL-DECEMBER 1856

Like Richmond, New Orleans was home to two prominent newspapers in 1856: the New Orleans *Times-Picayune* and the New Orleans *Bee*, a pro-Whig paper. Before the outbreak of civil war in Kansas and the caning of Charles Sumner, the *Picayune* held strong Democratic leanings. However, when portraying these two events the paper fluctuated between a pro-Democrat and pro-Whig stance on the issues. The *Picayune* did not align itself with any party during the time period in question, and ultimately threw its support behind the American Party presidential candidate, former Whig president, Millard Fillmore.

The two Louisiana papers revealed fewer differences with each other over the Kansas issues than did the Richmond papers. The probable explanation for this is that the Louisiana papers were less politically partisan than the Richmond papers. Unlike the Richmond papers, the New Orleans papers said little about the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act and the repeal of the Missouri Compromise. Neither the *Picayune* nor the *Bee* spoke of the Kansas-Nebraska Act in relation to the outbreak of civil war in Kansas. From April 1856 to December 1856 the *Picayune* did not comment on the implementation of the act and its effects on the South. The *Bee* said little about the act, but did comment on the squatter sovereignty principle of the bill. Like the Richmond *Whig*, the *Bee* was against squatter sovereignty. The *Bee* believed that "The Kansas bill contains another principle as odious to the South as any article of the Democratic creed. It sanctions one of the most obnoxious principles of squatter

sovereignty.”¹ The paper argued that squatter sovereignty allowed any alien who declared his intention to become a citizen of Kansas to vote and thus determine the character of social and political institutions in the territory. “The stupendous fraud and iniquity—the Kansas bill—fraught with squatter sovereignty and alien suffrage, was fastened upon the people of America, and the evils of it are fast approaching their complete development.”² The *Bee* viewed the bill as a bid and bribe by the Democratic Party to gain southern support for the upcoming presidential election.

Although party alignment did not seem to factor into the Louisiana papers’ depiction of the Kansas-Nebraska Act, it did affect the way each paper portrayed and defended the institution of slavery. The *Picayune* showed its Democratic leanings when defending black servitude. The *Bee* said little in defense of the institution, but did argue that abolitionist attempts to eradicate slavery strengthened the South’s conviction to keep slaves. If abolitionists had left the slave question alone, the paper said, Virginia, Kentucky, and Maryland would have established plans for the gradual emancipation of blacks.³

The *Picayune* considered slavery the best condition for Negroes. The paper argued that free blacks in the North were worse off than enslaved blacks in the South. Northerners looked at free blacks in their communities with distrust and disgust.⁴ “Social and political equality with the favored race are claimed for the negro [sic] as his inalienable right, yet where in the North are these advantages awarded, and where has

¹ New Orleans *Bee*, Saturday, October 4, 1856.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid, December 2, 1856.

⁴ New Orleans *Times-Picayune*, September 28, 1856.

he proved himself deserving of them?"⁵ The paper portrayed the northern black population as a community of idlers and petty larcenists that, although exceptions occurred, they were not numerous.⁶ When deviations did happen, the *Picayune* said, it was because blacks mixed with better blood, giving them an increase of energy and talent.⁷ The paper maintained that slaves were better provided for by their masters than northern blacks could provide for themselves. In addition, slaves would live longer and naturally increase their population at a faster rate than free blacks.

In addition to arguing that blacks were better off enslaved, the *Picayune* argued that whites and blacks were fundamentally different in their biological makeup. In an article quoting a Dr. Van Evrie the paper claimed that "The negro is not merely a *variety* of the white man. He is *no* white man at all."⁸ Evrie believed that there were too many ethnological and anatomical differences between blacks and whites for them to be the same species: he cited differences in coloring, hair texture, skull and brain contours, and physical proportions as the most obvious signs that whites and blacks were not the same species.⁹ The *Picayune* also cited the National Census Bureau of the United States which conclusively established, according to the paper, that free blacks were ten times more likely to suffer from idiocy, blindness, deafness, and other personal deformities than slaves.¹⁰

As in other instances the New Orleans papers took a moderate stand on the problems in Kansas. The outbreak of civil war in Kansas did not set the *Picayune* and

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid, October 26, 1856. This probably is Dr. John Van Evrie, a northern racist defender of slavery. See George M. Fredrickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817-1914* (New York and London: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1971), see 91-96.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid, September 28, 1856.

the *Bee* at odds with each other as it did the Richmond papers. Although the *Picayune* took a stronger stance on the issues than the *Bee*, neither paper justified the proslavery attack on Lawrence. In addition, the Louisiana papers, unlike the Richmond papers', said nothing about northern papers portrayal of the events in Kansas.

Even before the sack of Lawrence (but after the shooting of Sheriff Samuel J. Jones), the *Picayune* blamed free state settlers for the conflicts in the territory. The paper portrayed free state settlers' actions as insurrectionary and argued that if they were not checked revolution would occur.¹¹ "Almost every day outrages are perpetuated by the Free State people in order to bring on hostilities."¹² The *Picayune* placed blame for the unrest in Kansas on partisans in the North who sent Sharp's rifles to northern settlers in the territory. Even preachers had "Begged from the pulpit for rifles to be sent to them, to enable them to shoot down the officers of the law which they had determined to disobey."¹³

The *Picayune* condemned the shooting of Sheriff Jones and was outraged that Governor Charles Robinson, free state advocate, charged the proslavery party with the act. The paper asserted that ex-Governor Andrew H. "Reeder and Robinson, just before Jones was shot, had, in a meeting of the citizens of Lawrence, urged resistance to the Territorial laws, at all hazards—to any extremity."¹⁴

Although the shooting of Jones angered the *Picayune*, in mid May the paper still felt that tensions in the territory could be assuaged through a legal vote.¹⁵

¹¹ Ibid, May 15, 1856.

¹² Ibid, May 16, 1856.

¹³ Ibid, May 15, 1856.

¹⁴ Ibid, May, 17, 1856.

¹⁵ Ibid, May15, 1856.

All that is required to heal the dissensions is, that the preliminary elections for ascertaining the will of the real people shall be fairly conducted; and it is surely competent for Congress, in the enabling act, to prescribe rules which shall guard against fraud or violence.¹⁶

If Kansas was allowed to come into the United States as a state “with institutions freely and fairly selected by the people,” the troubles in the territory would come to an end.¹⁷

Immediately before accounts of the sack of Lawrence began to circulate, the *Picayune* reported that all of the leaders of the Lawrence rebellion were gone and that their resistance to the established authority had been a ploy to gain notoriety and money.¹⁸ “The truth is there is no justice in the cause—there is no bravery in the men who are its advocates—there is only desperation.”¹⁹ On Saturday, May 24 the *Picayune* reported that the town of Lawrence had been attacked. According to the report the hotel, printing office, and the printing press were destroyed.²⁰ A few days later the *Picayune* printed a full account of the battle. The paper claimed that on early Wednesday morning U. S. Marshall J. B. Donaldson and four to five hundred men from the territory took possession of the mound in front of Lawrence.²¹ Donaldson sent his deputy into the town with eight men to execute the writs. The group made four arrests before returning to Donaldson. Donaldson then dismissed the assembled men. A recovered Sheriff Jones appeared and reassembled the men into a posse. Jones, with twenty men, returned to Lawrence and demanded that Eldridge, the Free State Hotel owner, remove all of the furniture from his hotel. Eldridge refused and the posse put most of it into the street. The proslavery men then fired on the hotel walls until the walls

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid, May 25, 1856.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid, May 24, 1856.

²¹ Ibid, June 2, 1856.

began to fall. Afterwards they set fire to the building.²² According to the paper Jones ordered his men not to destroy personal property, but could not stop the posse from burning Robinson's house or from destroying the printing press.²³ Only one man was killed during the attack, when he attempted to escape.²⁴ A proslavery man was seriously injured by a falling brick and another proslavery man was accidentally shot (it was reported that he would probably recover from his wounds).²⁵

After the sack of Lawrence the *Picayune* wrote that about 300 citizens remained in the town—all were exasperated at their leaders for abandoning them during their time of need. The settlers pledged that they would no longer resist territorial laws.²⁶ According to the *Picayune*, abolitionists boasted that the proslavery party was afraid of their Sharp's rifles, when in fact it was the abolitionists who were the scared ones.²⁷ The free state party had proven their cowardice at Lawrence when they ran with their guns in hand and begged for quarter, which the proslavery party granted.²⁸

The *Picayune* believed the fight at Lawrence would quell the rebellious free state party and end the problems in the territory. The paper was therefore surprised when news of the Pottawatomie Massacre began to circulate.²⁹ Initial reports indicated that five proslavery men were killed at Pottawatomie Creek by abolitionists.³⁰ The *Picayune* depicted the murders as brutal. According to the paper, A. P. Wilkinson had been cut to pieces and one of William Doyle's sons (two were murdered in the attack) had his

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid, June 10, 1856.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

hands and ears cut off—after he had suffered a while the attackers quartered his head.³¹ William Sherman was butchered within hearing of his sick wife. The paper argued that the attack proved free state settlers did not fight fairly during the day; instead they fought under the cover of darkness. After the massacre, the paper condemned abolitionist cowardice. “If the Abolitionists are men of blood, why not shed it as men? Because they are not men. At Lawrence it could have been done; but no, they go where they are the stronger party, and kill in the dark.”³²

Before late April 1856, the *Bee* did not expect any serious difficulties in Kansas. The paper did, however, believe the territory would remain in a state of unrest until a state constitution was legally formed. After the shooting of Jones, the *Bee* changed its position in respect to the prospect of civil war in Kansas. Great excitement existed throughout the territory and the paper expected a battle to take place shortly. Like the *Picayune*, the *Bee* reported that the leaders of the Lawrence rebellion abandoned the townspeople in their time of greatest need.³³ The *Bee* maintained that the benevolent gentlemen of the North who contributed money for the purchase of Sharp’s rifles would find they had engaged in a ruinous speculation and would suffer in their pocketbooks.³⁴ The paper portrayed abolitionists as traitors to the laws of Kansas and, indirectly, as traitors to the laws of the United States.³⁵ “Unless the abolitionists back down, war must come. They have now got to fight or give up, and whichever turns out, they are beaten.”³⁶

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ New Orleans *Bee*, May 26, 1856.

³⁴ Ibid, April 5, 1856.

³⁵ Ibid, May 24, 1856.

³⁶ Ibid.

War did come to the territory. On May 26 the *Bee* reported that 500 men answered the Marshall's call for help and camped in the vicinity of Lawrence.³⁷ A larger number camped at Lecompton. The men's avowed purpose was to compel Lawrence citizens to acknowledge the organic law of the territory.³⁸ The paper printed a report of the attack from the St. Louis *Democrat* (according to the *Bee* the paper leaned towards black republicanism). The report stated that a posse assembled outside of Lawrence in accordance with Marshall Donaldson's proclamation on May 21 and took control of the roads leading to and from the town.³⁹ Donaldson took no notice of a note from the Committee of Public Safety in Lawrence assuring him that the citizens would not resist the serving of any writs. In addition the note asked Donaldson to protect their lives and property.⁴⁰ A group of five men entered the town, made arrests, and took dinner at the Free State Hotel.⁴¹ After Donaldson's men left, Jones appeared in Lawrence with eighteen armed men and insultingly demanded that private and public arms be given up. Lawrence citizens gave up the public arms but refused to hand over their private arms to Jones.⁴² Within thirty minutes of Jones's demand a posse of 300 plus men entered the town with two artillery pieces.⁴³ The posse destroyed the Free State Hotel and threw the town's two printing presses into the river.

Although the *Bee* condemned the Pottawatomie massacre, it said little about it after the initial reports. The paper reported that the victims had been horribly

³⁷ Ibid, May 26, 1856.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid, June 2, 1856.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

mutilated—some men had legs and arms chopped off and their eyes gouged out, all of the victims' throats were cut.⁴⁴

What a desperate state of affairs is the Territory struggling under—*murder*, the watchword and midnight deed of a scattered and scouting band of abolitionists who had courage only to fly from the face of a wronged and insulted people when met at their own solicitation.⁴⁵

The *Bee* further argued that southerners could not venture out alone and unarmed in the territory without the fear of being killed.⁴⁶

The *Picayune*, unlike the *Bee*, argued that the fighting in Kansas endangered the Union. After the sack of Lawrence and the Pottawatomie Massacre the paper believed that half-measures to end violence in the beleaguered territory would no longer suffice: the executive must promptly crush the treasonous acts and punish the traitors.⁴⁷ The *Picayune* recognized that both free state and proslavery settlers had committed outrages in the territory, however it blamed free state men for the outbreak of civil war: free state settlers were the first to excite the public mind. Northerners and northern settlers in Kansas heralded every attempt to restore order and peace as an act of tyranny and military usurpation by the proslavery party.⁴⁸

Violence begets violence; those outrages provoked retaliation and bloody conflicts have occurred between opposing parties of free State men and their abolition allies on the one hand, and proslavery men and the supporters of the territorial and Federal authorities on the other.⁴⁹

The public mind would eventually ask how the distress and misery in Kansas had been brought about: when that happened a fearful day of reckoning would be at hand.⁵⁰

⁴⁴ Ibid, June 10, 1856.

⁴⁵ Ibid, June 13, 1856.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ New Orleans *Times-Picayune*, June 15, 1856.

⁴⁸ Ibid, June 17, 1856.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid, October 1, 1856.

The New Orleans *Times-Picayune* and the New Orleans *Bee* claimed to encourage emigration to Kansas; neither paper, however, printed many articles encouraging southerners to move to Kansas or asking southerners to send monetary aid or goods to the territory. Both the *Picayune* and the *Bee* took a pro-Whig stance on the issue. Although both papers stated that they favored sending emigrants to Kansas to help secure the territory as a slave state, neither encouraged Louisianans to move there.

The *Picayune* said almost nothing about sending emigrants to Kansas. In one letter to the St. Louis Republican, dated May 13, the paper stated that Georgia, Alabama, South Carolina, and Tennessee were doing their duty to help make Kansas a slave state and that “If these things continue long, there will be no struggle at all; for the South is now several hundred ahead of the North in regard to this spring’s emigration, while at the same time, the South is increasing every day, and the North falling off.”⁵¹ The *Picayune* (as did the *Bee*) published another article covering a meeting held at the St. Louis Exchange on August 27. According to the paper a number of influential citizens requested the meeting be held to help find a way to support southern rights and southern emigrants in Kansas. Attendees passed a series of resolutions condemning the New England Emigrant Aid Society. One resolution promised that for every drop of southern blood shed by northern emigrants in Kansas, southerners would devise a mode of retribution.⁵²

After the outbreak of hostilities in Kansas, the *Picayune* did publish a circular from a proslavery man in Kansas strongly encouraging that aid be sent to the troubled

⁵¹ Ibid, May 13, 1856.

⁵² Ibid, August 28, 1856.

territory.⁵³ Prompt action was required if Kansas was to be made a slave state.⁵⁴ The circular reported that twenty to thirty proslavery people had been killed in the territory since the onset of fighting. It encouraged Louisianans to send money, horses and provisions to the beleaguered settlers.⁵⁵

Surprisingly the pro-Whig *Bee* published more articles that advocated sending emigrants to Kansas than the Democratic leaning *Picayune*. According to the *Bee*, Kansas

appeals to us by the life blood of our brethren murdered in the defense of their dwellings and property, established under the guarantee of the Constitution.

She appeals to us by the voice of the gallant survivors, who, destitute of means, and driven before the torrent of fanatical Abolitionists, pouring in upon them, and bent upon their extermination, are retreating towards the succoring arms of Missouri, who is nobly responding to the call and fighting our battles for us.”⁵⁶

The *Bee* emphasized that Louisiana had not contributed to the settlement of Kansas.

“We have not yet raised a man nor a dollar in furtherance of our own cause.”⁵⁷ The *Bee* told proslavery men of the South to awaken: the time for action had been forced on them.⁵⁸ Kansas was important to the South because “The South has *interests* at stake; the North has not. If we remain in lethargy, we are doomed in the end—and the chain which now binds the States of the South in prosperity and welfare will be snapped asunder by Abolition fanaticism.”⁵⁹ The paper published a letter from Joseph P. Carr on April 19; Carr stating that Missouri had already sent a large number of emigrants to

⁵³ Ibid, June 20, 1856.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ New Orleans *Bee*, August 25, 1856.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid, June 13, 1856.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

Kansas. Missouri was now asking other southern states to come to her assistance.⁶⁰ He believed slaveholding states needed to send 2000 voters to the territory for the conditions there to be settled in the South's favor.⁶¹

Neither Louisiana paper supported President Franklin Pierce's Kansas policy. Perhaps reflecting their political leanings, the *Picayune* did not comment at all on the administration's actions in the territory. The *Bee*, on the other hand, harshly criticized President Pierce's Kansas policy. The paper mournfully proclaimed "Wo [sic] to the country and her institutions, wo [sic] to the Union and its blessed promises, if ever this Kansas question gets beyond the control of the Executive authority!"⁶² The *Bee* maintained that "When troubles first broke out, and a bold and determined demonstration would have terrified the insurgents, he declined sending United States troops to the aid of Governor SHANNON and issued paper pellets in the shape of proclamations."⁶³ The paper felt that the longer the civil war lasted, the harder it would be to get under control and that Pierce would not be able to put down the rebellion. The *Bee* characterized the president's policy as timid, time serving and shuffling.⁶⁴ Pierce sought to please everybody and, in the end, pleased nobody in his dealings with Kansas.⁶⁵

Both papers published the President's message, but only the *Picayune* commented on it. The paper saw Pierce's speech as well written and depicted it as an important document. The *Picayune* praised the president's message because it

⁶⁰ Ibid, April 19, 1856.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid, June 24, 1856

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid, November 28, 1856.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

asserted equality between the states and traced the growth of a sectional party, the Republicans.

The New Orleans *Picayune*, unlike the *Bee* and the Richmond papers, did comment on congressional proceedings in regards to Kansas. The *Picayune* placed direct blame on Congress for not putting an end to the fighting in the territory. The paper believed “If there be not found some way to put an end to anarchy in Kansas, and restore there the dominion of law and good order, the whole theory and practice of American republicanism will be fatally damaged.”⁶⁶ The *Picayune* saw the use of military force as the only way to put an end to the civil war in the territory. The paper believed, in mid-June, that the Senate recognized that the military must be used to stop the violence in Kansas. By July, however, the *Picayune* changed its tone. The paper lamented that, if the temperament of the Senate was anything to gage by, it would be difficult, if not impossible to settle the Kansas question.⁶⁷

The *Picayune* blamed the Republican Party for the troubles in Kansas. The paper argued that

If there not be out of Congress more moderation of temper, a higher respect for law, and a more just consideration of the constitutional rights of the Southern States, than have been exhibited by these Republicans, the gloomiest day the country has ever seen is just beginning to thicken over us.⁶⁸

The *Picayune* asked, “Will there not be found two or three to surrender passion, prejudice and faction for the sake of pacifying these deadly and dangerous contentions?”⁶⁹ Republicans refused all concessions and compromises brought before them that would calm tensions in Kansas and end the fighting. The *Picayune* believed

⁶⁶ New Orleans *Times-Picayune*, June 18, 1856

⁶⁷ Ibid, July 10, 1856.

⁶⁸ Ibid, August 1, 1856.

⁶⁹ Ibid, July 10, 1856.

that Republicans were using Kansas for party purposes, to inflame the North against the South and that the Republican Party wanted to keep up agitation until after the presidential election.⁷⁰

In these outrages, it is apparent that the tools of the Black Republican party began them, and it is equally apparent that they were dictated by the Black Republicans of the North, who found that the work of agitation was dying out for want of exciting materials.⁷¹

The article concluded that in every past crisis the Union had faced, men sacrificed pride, position, and opinion to keep the country harmonious and at peace.⁷²

Although the *Bee* said nothing of Congress's stalemate over the Kansas issue, the paper, like the *Picayune*, accused Republicans of using Kansas to further their bid for the presidency.⁷³ The paper maintained that differences in Kansas were a godsend to the Republican Party. "Every death was worth a thousand votes."⁷⁴

The Louisiana papers took a more moderate stance on the possibility of disunion than the Virginia papers. The *Times-Picayune* feared that the troubles in Kansas would result in the dissolution of the Union and argued that the South was stronger in the Union than it would be out of the Union. While the *Bee* did not want the Union to dissolve, it did feel that the danger was imminent: the South would secede if forced to choose between the Union and slavery.

The *Picayune* took a Whig stance when discussing the possibility of disunion. The paper viewed the times as troubling—the Union was about to pass through the most trying ordeal it had ever been subjected too.⁷⁵ It blamed northern fanatics and

⁷⁰ Ibid, July 24, 1856.

⁷¹ Ibid, August 27, 1856.

⁷² Ibid, July 10, 1856.

⁷³ New Orleans *Bee*, November 12, 1856.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ New Orleans *Times-Picayune*, September 14, 1856.

southern dissenters for the crisis. “The insane fury of fanaticism, and the equally insane ravings of disunionism, alike disturb the political atmosphere, and are alike in their pernicious influences.”⁷⁶ The *Picayune* felt that most people were oblivious to the present dangers. Surprisingly the paper viewed both Republicans and Democrats as sectional parties:

There is one South as well as one North, and they are equally prolific of their incendiary appeals, and defiant threats, and equally distinguished by their readiness for a disruption of the Union, each having about the same estimate of the other, and a very unfavorable one at that.⁷⁷

The paper asserted that “Each party seems determined to rule or ruin.”⁷⁸ Republicans pursued a wicked crusade against southern rights and interests and Democrats answered the challenge.⁷⁹

Disorder is triumphant, and, instead of the energies of the whole people being harmoniously directed for the promotion of the national prosperity, the leaders of two powerful parties are endeavoring to engage the people in sectional strife.⁸⁰

The paper argued that “Sectional feelings and sectional jealousies must be abandoned—if persisted in they will destroy the Union.”⁸¹ The *Picayune* believed that the scenes in Kansas presented convincing evidence of the lengths to which both sectional parties were prepared to go to further their agenda.

The *Picayune* argued that the Union’s foundation was based on mutual concession between all states: that each section must make sacrifices to obtain full

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid, October 10, 1856.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

participation in the benefits of the common Union.⁸² The paper maintained that the North and South were stronger together than they would be apart.

In the eighty years of our independent existence, we have made greater progress ... in all that constitutes a powerful nation, we have carried civilization further, than has ever been accomplished in a like period of time by any other nation of ancient or modern days.⁸³

The paper believed that although “The present aspect of public affairs awakens no pleasing emotions” the clouds would disperse before long and the Union would shine as brightly as ever, it would be more strongly united after the storm passed, and it would be the envy and admiration of the world.⁸⁴ According to the *Picayune* there had been times in the past when it seemed that the Union would dissolve, during those past crises conservative men had stepped forward and calmed peoples’ fears. Southerners asked for nothing more than that which the Constitution entitled them to and they would endeavor to maintain their rights through constitutional means.⁸⁵ The *Picayune* did not advocate secession but claimed that southern people knew their rights and would maintain them in the Union.

The *Bee* did not comment much on the possibility of disunion. However, in one article from December 18, the paper took a slightly Democratic stance on the issue. It argued that although the Union could still be saved, time was short and the danger was imminent.⁸⁶

We tell the North that she is striving madly and senselessly to destroy the bonds that unite her with the South. The slaveholding States cannot pause to argue the morality of human servitude. The institution exists amongst them, and is incapable of annihilation, save by violence and blood shed [sic].⁸⁷

⁸² Ibid, October 8, 1856.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid, September 11, 1856.

⁸⁵ Ibid, October 23, 1856.

⁸⁶ New Orleans *Bee*, December 18, 1856.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

Southerners, divided on other issues, were united on this—"The Union is dear to a large majority of them, but we speak advisedly when we say that it is daily forfeiting its value."⁸⁸

As in the Kansas issue, the New Orleans papers did not radically differ in their opinions concerning the assault of Senator Charles Sumner by House Representative Preston S. Brooks. Although the *Picayune* and the *Bee* disapproved of Sumner's speech against Kansas, neither justified Brooks's attack on Sumner as the proper mode of retribution. The two papers condemned the caning: Brooks's actions would hurt, not help, the South; the caning gained Sumner and his abolitionist friends notoriety and support.

The *Picayune* censured Sumner's Kansas speech and accused Sumner of using the speech to insult southerners, congressmen, and the President:

One-half of the States of the Union, two-thirds of the Senate, the whole Executive administration, and vast numbers of the best citizens of the free states, who agree in sentiment with the South on a topic of constitutional rights, and duties are held up to the execration of mankind, as detestable criminals, irredeemably corrupt and infamous.⁸⁹

Even before the paper received the entirety of Sumner's speech, the *Picayune* condemned it as a bitter tirade against slavery and slaveholding.⁹⁰ On conclusion of his speech "It was publicly denounced by some of the most grave and moderate Senators as incendiary and un-American."⁹¹ The *Picayune* believed Sumner expected the speech to be published and wrote it out before delivering it in the Senate chambers. The premeditation of the speech made it more odious in character because it had not

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ New Orleans *Times-Picayune*, May 28, 1856.

⁹⁰ Ibid, May 27, 1856.

⁹¹ Ibid.

been spoken in the heat of the moment.⁹² “It was coolly planned for the purposes of irritation and insult. Overbearing, dogmatical, self-righteous and intolerant, it pours out upon slavery, slaveholders and slaveholding a torrent of savage invective.”⁹³

Like the *Picayune*, the *Bee* criticized Sumner’s speech and pointed out that other senators regarded the speech as offensive and un-American.⁹⁴ The *Bee* printed an article (from the *Albany Argus*) accusing Sumner of rehearsing his speech beforehand and claiming that Senator William H. Seward was present at the rehearsal.⁹⁵ According to the *Bee*, Seward regretfully listened to Sumner’s speech and entreated him to make the wording less offensive.⁹⁶ The *Bee* reported that the *Argus* regretted Sumner did not take Seward’s advice. “It might have averted an occurrence, for which it is true there was no justifiable provocation, but which can only be regarded as a calamity.”⁹⁷

As in other controversial issues plaguing the country in 1856, the *Picayune*’s viewpoint on the caning of Senator Sumner was Whiggish rather than Democratic. According to the paper, Brooks approached Sumner while he was seated at his desk, bent over writing.⁹⁸ Although Sumner rose after the first blow, the hit stunned him and he reeled over against another desk.⁹⁹ He was powerless to defend himself. The paper claimed that Brooks hit Sumner at least a dozen times, maybe as many as twenty times, with great force and rapidity.¹⁰⁰ Representative Laurence Keitt prevented people near

⁹² Ibid, May 28, 1856.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ New Orleans *Bee*, May 27, 1856.

⁹⁵ Ibid, June 5, 1856.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ New Orleans *Times-Picayune*, May 29, 1856.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

Sumner from intervening in the attack.¹⁰¹ Brooks's justification for the assault was Sumner's remarks about Senator Andrew Pickens Butler, an aged relative of Brooks's. The *Picayune* believed that the act, "However great the provocation may have been, is one to be deeply deplored under any state of facts, and unless circumstances appear which we cannot well imagine, in extenuation, is to be severely reprehended."¹⁰² The paper felt it would have been better for Brooks to reply to Sumner with words or silence.

Mr. Brooks, in suffering his temper to overmaster his judgment, offended against the spirit of this rule, and we are afraid that it will be seen that he has lifted Mr. Sumner into a higher place with his followers and armed him with new capacity for mischief. The assault was, not only wrong in principle, but exceedingly impolitic, and the effect will doubtless be felt injuriously upon the public questions which are dividing the country.¹⁰³

The *Picayune* maintained that the caning gained Sumner sympathizers: men who would not have normally sided with Sumner would now feel compassion for him.¹⁰⁴ Brooks's actions did not benefit the South.

The *Bee*, like the *Picayune*, condemned Brooks's attack on Sumner. The *Bee*, however, felt that if the assault had taken place anywhere other than the Senate chamber, the act itself would have elicited little, if any, censure.¹⁰⁵ "It is deeply to be regretted that Mr. Brooks did not chastise SUMNER elsewhere than in the Senate Chamber, and did not give him first a chance of vindicating the dignity of his manhood, if he possesses any."¹⁰⁶ Although Sumner's speech was intensely personal and insulting to the South, the caning was not the proper way to avenge the wrong.¹⁰⁷ "As it is, BROOKS has only exposed himself to censure, and created an excitement in the North

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid, May 27, 1856.

¹⁰³ Ibid, May 28, 1856.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ New Orleans *Bee*, May 29, 1856.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

highly unfavorable to Southern rights and interests.”¹⁰⁸ In assaulting Sumner, Brooks gained notoriety for himself. The South gained nothing. The attack made Sumner a hero and gave the antislavery coalition the very thing which they desired: support.¹⁰⁹ According to the *Bee* “Mr. Brooks has done more to spread and give zeal and enthusiasm to Free-Soilism than all Mr. Sumner has ever done or ever could do.”¹¹⁰ In addition, millions of people would now read the speech who would otherwise never have seen or heard of it; “And the viscous and seditious abolition speech of Sumner, which otherwise would have required a liberal outlay of abolition money to give it a circulation, will now be in demand where its poison may work some mischief.”¹¹¹

The *Bee* believed that the Sumner and Brooks affair revived the Republican Party.¹¹² Prior to the assault Republicans were in desperate straits. “The community had discovered their wares to be worthless, and their goods, though beautifully labeled, to be trash that was unsuited to the market.”¹¹³ Although the paper had no sympathy for Sumner, the *Bee* regretted that Brooks attacked him. In assaulting the senator, Brooks united the North against the South. According to the paper at least half of the northern population read the exaggerated accounts of the attack on Sumner.¹¹⁴ Northerners “know little or nothing of the vile indignities heaped by him on the head of a gray-haired and absent Senator, of the studied tone of the insult and contumely towards the South pervading the entire speech.”¹¹⁵ All northerners knew was that one of their

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, May 30, 1856.

¹¹⁰ Ibid, June 2, 1856.

¹¹¹ Ibid, May 30, 1856.

¹¹² Ibid, June 3, 1856.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

citizens had been struck down and beaten.¹¹⁶ In addition, northern citizens knew almost nothing about the South's honor code: that he who inflicts insult or injury should atone or suffer the consequences. They would not understand Brooks's response to Sumner's speech.¹¹⁷ The *Bee* maintained that the assault of Sumner gave abolitionists a new issue: the Kansas issue having grown stale, had been rejuvenated by Brooks's assault on Sumner.

The chastisement inflicted on SUMNER quickened into energy the dormant free-soil proclivities of the North, and aroused with tenfold violence the anti-Nebraska feeling, which had previously grown languid, despite the constant efforts of Abolition zealots to maintain it in pristine vigor.¹¹⁸

The caning accomplished what the problems in Kansas could not: Sumner's sore head gained Republicans 50,000 votes.¹¹⁹

Although the New Orleans *Times-Picayune* disapproved of Brooks's actions, the paper did not believe the House had the right to punish Brooks for caning Sumner. The assault did not occur in the House and Brooks did not assault a House member. The *Picayune* was surprised that 120 House members voted to expel Brooks for assaulting Sumner.¹²⁰ The paper felt that the vote showed "that a majority can be hurried away by the madness of party into actions which shock all our ideas of natural justice, and which disregard and would break down all the constitutional safeguards of the rights of the citizen."¹²¹ The *Picayune* maintained that if a breach of privilege had occurred, it occurred in the Senate, not the House. It was a senator who was attacked and if the freedom of debate was violated it was violated in the Senate. The House usurped the

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid, June 6, 1856.

¹¹⁹ Ibid, June 9, 1856.

¹²⁰ New Orleans *Times-Picayune*, July 16, 1856.

¹²¹ Ibid.

Senate's privilege by taking action. Brooks committed no offense against the House's dignity and did not infringe on its rights. The *Picayune* charged that the actions of the House were partisan and vindictive.

The *Picayune* argued that the Senate, like the House, did not have the right to punish Brooks for assaulting Sumner. Sumner deliberately delivered an insulting tirade against the South.¹²² To add to his crimes, Sumner had the speech printed prior to delivering it to the Senate. "Mr. Sumner was beaten because he wantonly and deliberately outraged a whole community with the grossest slanders, and brutally insulted an honorable gentleman."¹²³ The *Picayune* argued that the Senate chambers did not have sanctity of place but that there was sanctity in the organized body. Brooks had not infringed on the Senate's sanctity because the assault did not occur while the Senate was in session. It was an accident that the attack took place in the Senate chambers at all. Finally, the *Picayune* argued that, although a breach of privilege had not occurred, Brooks had committed a breach of peace and for that a court of law had punished him.¹²⁴

While the *Bee* did comment on the possibility of Brooks's expulsion from the House, it, unlike the other three papers in this study, presented no arguments claiming that the House did not have right to take cognizance of the assault. In a June 9 article, the *Bee* speculated on what the House's action would be in regards to Brooks.¹²⁵

Parties in the House were evenly divided. The paper believed that, unless the assault

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ New Orleans *Bee*, June 9, 1856.

became a sectional question, it would be difficult to say how it would be disposed of.¹²⁶

The *Bee* felt that Brooks would not be expelled but it did say that if the House took a sectional vote, Brooks would be removed from his seat. The paper hoped that, in disposing of the caning issue, the House would take action to end the hostilities between members that had prevailed for the past few years.¹²⁷ “Men gaze at one another with fierce and hostile eyes, and talk at one another as if they were engaged in personal altercations, and had met for mutual browbeating.”¹²⁸

Both the New Orleans *Times-Picayune* and the New Orleans *Bee* reported on Brooks’s resignation from the House of Representatives. The *Picayune* printed Brooks’s letter to the Senate and his resignation speech to the House. In his letter to the Senate, Brooks said that he caned Sumner because he had no other choice: not only had Sumner insulted an absent friend and family member, he did not take responsibility for his actions.¹²⁹ Brooks apologized to senators saying “It is with unfeigned regret I find in the report that what I had intended only as redress of a personal wrong had been construed into or must necessarily be held as a breach of privilege in the Senate.”¹³⁰ Brooks maintained that he carefully read Sumner’s speech before deciding to take action. He did not consider that he should have to restrain himself because the offense came from a senator. Brooks vindicated the place of the assault saying that it took place in the Senate because he could not find Sumner at other locations. The Senate had been adjourned for more than an hour before he approached Sumner.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ New Orleans *Times-Picayune*, June 10, 1856.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

In his address to the House Brooks maintained that “Whoever insulted South Carolina insulted him, and he stood ready at all times, humbly and modestly as a son to perform his duty; and he always would resent such insults to his State, cost what it might.”¹³¹ He believed the assault to be a personal affair and meant no disrespect to the House, Senate, or Massachusetts. Although Brooks said he was aware of the responsibility he incurred by taking the law into his own hands, he was surprised that he could be punished by both a court of law and by the House.¹³² According to Brooks, he could not remain in his seat and maintain his self-respect and rights under the Constitution. He had never been called to order and had never offended another House member (as far as he was aware).¹³³ Brooks believed the vote, even though the House did not get the two-thirds necessary to expel him, transmitted his name to posterity as a member who was unworthy of his seat because of disorderly behavior.¹³⁴ He resigned his position and said that he would appeal to his constituents for their verdict.¹³⁵ If deemed worthy, South Carolina’s voters would return him to his seat.

The *Bee*, like the *Picayune*, published Brooks’s letter to the Senate and his resignation speech to the House. The *Bee* focused on slightly different aspects of the letter but printed the same material in regards to the resignation speech. In his letter to the Senate, Brooks said that he considered himself a gentleman of society.¹³⁶ According to Brooks he read Sumner’s speech carefully and found, in the speech, language that unjustly reflected on the history and character of South Carolina and

¹³¹ Ibid, July 22, 1856.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ New Orleans *Bee*, June 10, 1856.

Butler. “To such language I thought I had a just right to take exception under the circumstances, the Senator from South Carolina who was affected by those remarks, being absent from the Senate and city.”¹³⁷ Brooks said that he had reason to believe Sumner did not acknowledge personal responsibility for the speech: if Sumner had acknowledged responsibility Brooks would have been saved from the painful necessity of caning him.¹³⁸

Both papers believed that South Carolina voters would return Brooks to his seat in the House. The *Bee* stated that “He will be returned without opposition and with an unprecedented large vote, as a compliment.”¹³⁹ The *Picayune* and the *Bee* reported that Brooks received 7900 votes.¹⁴⁰ In addition, he was given \$600 to help him pay the expenses resulting from the assault.¹⁴¹

In addition to printing articles covering Brooks’s resignation from the House, the *Bee* published an article from the Charleston papers that covered a speech Brooks made to his constituents. The paper maintained that the speech was intensely Democratic and even more intensely disunionist.¹⁴² According to the *Bee*

Mr. Brooks added several hundred thousand votes to the Abolition strength of the North, by his unfortunate assault on SUMNER—unfortunate we mean as to time, place and manner—and having thus helped to build up anti-slavery, is now anxious to get out of the Union as speedily as possible, in order to leave the Abolitionists nothing but the North to govern.¹⁴³

The paper argued that Brooks wanted to anger the South against the North so that southerners would think of dissolving the Union. The *Bee* believed that Brooks “wants

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Ibid, July 24, 1856.

¹⁴⁰ New Orleans *Times-Picayune*, August 5, 1856 and New Orleans *Bee*, August 6, 1856..

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² New Orleans *Bee*, October 20, 1856.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

the South oppressed and maddened to the point of resistance.”¹⁴⁴

Surprisingly neither of the New Orleans papers commented much on Sumner’s injuries. The *Picayune* said nothing about the possibility that Sumner was feigning his illness. The *Bee* claimed in one article that Sumner was faking his illness. The paper stated that Sumner would not walk out of his rooms even if it would earn him some respect.¹⁴⁵ In addition the paper advised Sumner to “...remember, if he is lying on his back for effect, that the possum is not a much more respectable animal than the skunk, to which he very appropriately likened Mr. Douglas.”¹⁴⁶ The paper maintained that the public did not understand why it would take anyone so long to recover from blows inflicted by a gutta percha cane.¹⁴⁷ According to the *Bee*, “What might have been sympathy at first seems fast changing to contempt.” The public would not be fooled for long.¹⁴⁸

In looking at the Louisiana papers it is more difficult to see how party sentiment affected the way each paper portrayed the outbreak of civil war in Kansas and the caning of Charles Sumner. The Louisiana papers took a more moderate stance on the two issues than the Virginia papers. Political party leanings appear to have played a lesser role in the lower South newspapers than in those of the upper South.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid, July 1, 1856.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Political party sentiment and geographic location affected how all four of the newspapers under investigation viewed the Kansas-Nebraska and Sumner issues. While political party influences affected each of the papers publications, party ties are more easily seen in the two Whig papers than in the two Democratic papers. In particular, the New Orleans *Picayune*, while it was a Democratic leaning publication, sometimes diverged from Democratic Party positions in its stance on the issues in question.

When looking at the two Democratic papers, the Richmond *Enquirer* and the New Orleans *Times-Picayune*, it appears that geographic location affected the way each paper depicted the outbreak of conflict in Kansas more than party sentiment. As a true Democratic organ, the *Enquirer* fully supported the Kansas-Nebraska Act and the repeal of the Missouri Compromise. It encouraged sending southern emigrants to Kansas and argued that the South must win Kansas to maintain its status in the Union. The *Picayune*, on the other hand, said nothing of the Kansas-Nebraska Act or the repeal of the Missouri Compromise. Although both papers blamed the Republican Party and the free-state settlers for the outbreak of violence in Kansas, the *Picayune* criticized both the free-state and proslavery parties for committing outrages in the territory. The *Picayune* charged free-state settlers with the instigation of hostilities and both free-state and proslavery settlers with perpetuating the fighting. The *Enquirer* depicted the Republican Party as the single greatest threat to the Union and accused it of sending the Kansas Investigating Committee to the beleaguered territory to instigate rebellion. It

also maintained that the outbreak of civil war in Kansas and the resulting conflicts in Congress endangered the Union and supported secession if the South lost Kansas. Like the Democratic *Enquirer* the *Picayune* believed that fighting in Kansas endangered the Union. In contrast to the *Enquirer*, however, the more conservative *Picayune* feared disunion. The latter paper felt that secession would weaken, not strengthen the South. Interestingly the *Picayune* portrayed both the Republican Party and the Democratic Party as sectional forces striving to tear the Union apart. The paper feared that the actions of the two parties in Congress put the Union in jeopardy. The *Picayune* was the only one of the four newspapers presented in this study to blame Congress for not ending the fighting in Kansas.

Both Democratic papers approved of the attack on Lawrence. The *Enquirer* claimed that the town was filled with murderers and thieves, intent on causing trouble in the territory. The *Picayune* argued that the fight at Lawrence would quell the free state party and put an end to problems in the territory. In this respect the two papers arguments were similar. However, when discussing the Pottawatomie Massacre, it becomes clear that the *Picayune* was the more moderate of the two newspapers. Although both papers expressed surprise at the news of the Pottawatomie Massacre, the *Enquirer* commented more on the event than the *Picayune*. According to the latter the murders were simply the latest attack in a long list of cruel acts by abolitionists.

The two Democratic papers differed once again in their views of the administration's Kansas policy. The *Enquirer* was the only one of the papers presented in this study to justify President Franklin Pierce's actions in Kansas. Surprisingly the

Democratic leaning *Picayune* said nothing about the administration's handling of the events in Kansas.

In looking at the two Whig papers, the Richmond *Whig* and the New Orleans *Bee*, it is much easier to see the impact of party influences on their portrayal of events in the territory. Unlike the Democratic papers, the Whig papers saw eye to eye in regard to the Kansas-Nebraska Act and the resulting conflicts in the troubled territory. The *Whig* reluctantly supported the Kansas-Nebraska Act only because the paper thought that the act would allow southerners to gain Kansas as a slave state. The *Bee* said nothing about the Kansas-Nebraska Act other than that it was a bid and bribe by Democrats to gain southern support for the upcoming presidential election, a sentiment the *Whig* also voiced in December 1856. Neither paper favored squatter sovereignty. Whigs believed that the squatter sovereignty principle of the Kansas-Nebraska Act endangered the Union because it recognized the rights of squatters. As with the two Democratic papers, the two Whig papers diverged somewhat on the possibility of disunion. The *Whig*, like the two Democratic papers, worried that the problems in Kansas endangered the Union. In addition, as did the *Picayune*, the *Whig* argued that abolitionists and southern secessionists were equally dangerous to the Union. The *Bee* did not comment on the possibility of disunion.

Before the shooting of Sheriff Samuel J. Jones both Whig papers believed that Kansas would be made a slave state with little to no opposition. Neither expected any serious difficulties to occur in the territory. The two papers changed their tone after the shooting. Both expected civil war to break out in the territory. The *Whig* believed, however, that troubles in the territory would have ended after the attack on Lawrence if

not for the political ambitions of eastern men. The *Bee* made no such claims. News of the Pottawatomie Massacre shocked and outraged both Whig papers but the upper South Richmond *Whig* took a more militant stance on the issue. The *Whig*, as did the *Enquirer*, accused northern papers of being indifferent to the entire affair.

As expected, neither Whig paper supported President Pierce or his actions in the territory. While the Richmond *Whig* did not comment on the administration's policy in Kansas, the New Orleans *Bee* criticized President Pierce for his administration's handling of the outbreak of violence in Kansas. The paper blamed him for the difficulties in the territory and believed that a stronger hand could have put an end to the fighting in the territory.

Unlike the Kansas issue, where party lines, at least partially, influenced the way each paper portrayed the matter in question, the assault on Sumner unequivocally divided the South along upper South and lower South lines. The upper South Virginia papers took a more radical view of the caning than the lower South Louisiana papers, which were very conservative in their reports.

Not surprisingly all of the papers researched in this study condemned Sumner's speech against Kansas. The *Enquirer* felt that the oration was revolutionary and inflammatory and accused Sumner of rehearsing the speech before a mirror with a Negro boy. The paper maintained that northern senators and representatives had used their positions for far too long to insult southerners and praised Brooks's assault. The *Enquirer* even vindicated the assault having taken place in the halls of Congress, arguing that Brooks had attempted to find Sumner elsewhere in vain and that the Senate had been out of session for more than an hour before the attack took place. In

addition, the paper argued that Brooks duly warned Sumner before the caning occurred. While the *Picayune* censured Sumner's speech, it did not condone Brooks's attack on Sumner. The paper argued that the assault would hurt the South and wished Brooks had used nonviolent measures to resolve the quarrel.

Neither Democratic paper believed that the House of Representatives had the right to take cognizance of what they portrayed as a private quarrel. The *Enquirer* adamantly maintained that the House did not have the right to punish Brooks. In juxtaposition to the House's stance, the radical paper argued that it was Sumner, not Brooks, who had committed a breach of privilege. Sumner should be punished for his vile speech. Like the *Enquirer*, the *Picayune* did not believe the House had the right to take cognizance of the assault. The *Picayune*, however, did not advocate punishing Sumner for his speech.

In addition to approving of Brooks's assault, the *Enquirer* condemned northern papers for attempting to make a martyr out of Sumner and said that Sumner was "playing possum" in order to gain attention. The conservative *Picayune* said nothing about the possibility that Sumner was faking his illness and did not take northern papers to task for printing articles on the assault and on Sumner's illness.

The Richmond *Whig* took a more conservative stance on the outbreak of fighting in Kansas than the Richmond *Enquirer*. The same can not be said for the *Whig's* take on the assault of Sumner. The paper became much more radical in its tone when speaking of the caning and claimed that Sumner's speech turned their thoughts to war. Like the *Enquirer*, the *Whig* stated that Sumner rehearsed his speech in front of a Negro boy. Although the *Whig* did not vindicate Brooks's actions to the same extent as the

Enquirer, the *Whig* supported the caning. While the latter was disappointed that Brooks did not inform Sumner of his intentions, the paper ultimately stated that it was not sure if such notice was due. The paper's biggest regret was that the assault took place in the Senate chamber; if it had taken place anywhere else there would be no reason to admonish Brooks for the attack. The *Whig* argued that the North did not understand the South's code of honor and therefore could not understand why Brooks felt that the caning was necessary. In contrast to the *Whig*, the *Bee* took a conservative stand on the caning of Sumner. Although the paper condemned Sumner's speech, it did not condone Brooks's actions, and criticized Brooks because the assault took place in the Senate chamber. The *Bee* felt that Brooks would have done better to chastise Sumner elsewhere. As did the *Picayune*, the *Bee* believed that Brooks should have replied to Sumner with words, not violence. In caning Sumner, the paper argued, Brooks revitalized the Republican Party and ultimately hurt the South. Interestingly the *Bee*, like the *Whig*, argued that the northern population did not understand the South's honor code and, therefore, would not understand why Brooks felt it necessary to cane Sumner for insulting his relative and state.

Like the two Democratic papers, the Richmond *Whig* felt that neither the House nor the Senate had the right to take cognizance of what it deemed a private quarrel. The matter was a personal one, belonging to the courts. Surprisingly the New Orleans *Bee* said nothing about the House's inquiry into the assault on Sumner. The paper was the only one of the four presented in this thesis that did not take the House to task for taking notice of the affair. The *Whig* echoed the *Enquirer's* sentiments that the northern press used the assault to gain sympathy for the abolitionist cause and charged that

Sumner was faking his illness to gain notoriety. Although, unlike the *Picayune*, the *Bee* did mention in one article that Sumner might be faking his illness, the paper did not take a radical stance on the issue, as did the Richmond papers. The *Bee*'s article concerning the possibility that Sumner was "playing possum" was extremely short. In addition, the paper did not accuse the northern press of using the event to gain northern sympathies.

This study began with an attempt to discover whether or not the upper and lower South differed in their respective responses and their newspaper portrayals of the outbreak of civil war in Kansas and the caning of Charles Sumner. This study also attempted to determine to what degree location and/or political party affected the above responses and portrayals. In the final analysis of the four papers presented in this study it appears that location affected each of the papers' handling of the two events more than political alignment. Given the fact that Louisiana was among the first states and Virginia among the last to secede from the Union, it is somewhat surprising that the upper South, Virginia, papers proved to be more radical in their tone than did the lower South, Louisiana, papers.

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